The WoW Factor

A Study on Player Motivations in World of Warcraft

Matias Puronlahti

University of Tampere
Faculty of Information Technology and Communication
Internet and Game Studies
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This thesis studies how player motivations in World of Warcraft have changed in the past fifteen years by comparing the oldest and the most recent versions of the game. Bartle's taxonomy of player types is used to categorize different activities in the game which are then compared between game versions. A survey comprising of 23 items is used to gather data from players of both versions, and the results are validated using factor analysis. Significant findings are reported, and the differences are analysed to understand how the two versions differ in terms of player motivations.

The results indicate that players of World of Warcraft have moved away from casual socializing. This is argued to be affected by game design choices and was reflected on the types of players the game currently attracts. Players of both versions of the game enjoyed playing with their friends, but players of Vanilla put more emphasis on different aspects of social play and exploration.

Keywords: World of Warcraft, player motivations, player type, social, MMORPG

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1. Introduction

This thesis studies *World of Warcraft (WoW)*, a *Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game* (MMORPG, sometimes MMO). The focus is on how the game has changed in the past fifteen years from the perspective of player motivations. A major motivator for this thesis is the announcement of *World of Warcraft Classic* by *Blizzard Entertainment* in 2017. WoW Classic will take players back in time to 2004 – the year World of Warcraft was released – and offers an arguably different gaming experience from what WoW is today. The aim of this thesis is to analyze these two versions of World of Warcraft, the first and the latest, to offer insights as to what makes these versions different. This gives an indication as to why players choose one version over the other. In order to analyze the first version (both *Classic* and *Vanilla* are commonly used to describe the first version of World of Warcraft) this thesis analyzes *private servers*, a phenomenon that has allowed players to play whichever version of WoW they want. As the name suggests, private servers are hosted privately and, excluding publicly obtainable game data, have no connection to Blizzard Entertainment. The thesis will be built upon relevant studies on virtual community, collaboration in games, private servers, player motivations, and player type theory. In addition, an overview of the development arc of the now fifteen-year-old MMO offers a comparison between the two versions and their affordances. A survey is conducted for players of both private, and official (also called *Retail*), servers to find out about their motivations, and a statistical analysis is conducted on the data to shed light on the user motivations of different versions of WoW. The results can also be used more broadly in other studies that benefit from knowing about the motivations of players of such games.

Throughout its history World of Warcraft has been classified as an MMORPG, which denotes that it relies heavily on social interactions between players (Brown and Bell, 2004). However, current discourse indicates that during the years WoW has changed to a more single-player experience (WoW Forums). The social relevance for the study stems from what appears to be an overall unhappiness towards WoW's current direction as a game (WoW Forums), and from the

popularity of private servers as an alternative. Scientifically this study finds relevance in studying private servers as the closest current-day equivalent to WoW during its early years, a comparison that has yet to be made and that definitely has information to offer to the scientific community in terms of MMORPG player motivations. The main motivation involves the community that stems from a need for co-operation, which in turn is affected by the base game mechanics that have a power to either encourage or deter from group play.

It is important to distinguish the differences between what World of Warcraft is today, what it was, and how it exists on private servers in order to understand why player motivations differ between the two versions. This will be done by looking at the history of World of Warcraft from the point of view of major changes made. These will be considered when analyzing the motivations of players that play on private servers. Then an overall look into the private server phenomenon is conducted to gain a better understanding of what they offer to the players which they cannot obtain from the official version of the game. The study will make use of factor analysis to group player motivations into player types, which will then be examined cross-group and between the two game versions. Given that Blizzard has announced the development of Classic WoW justifies a study that compares the first and the latest versions of World of Warcraft to identify major differences between the two. Fifteen years of development are bound to change a game, but to what effect should be determined.

The research questions for this thesis are:

1. What are the major differences concerning the community and gameplay between Vanilla World of Warcraft and Battle for Azeroth?
2. What has caused these differences?
3. What are the player motivations for playing either version?

2. Background

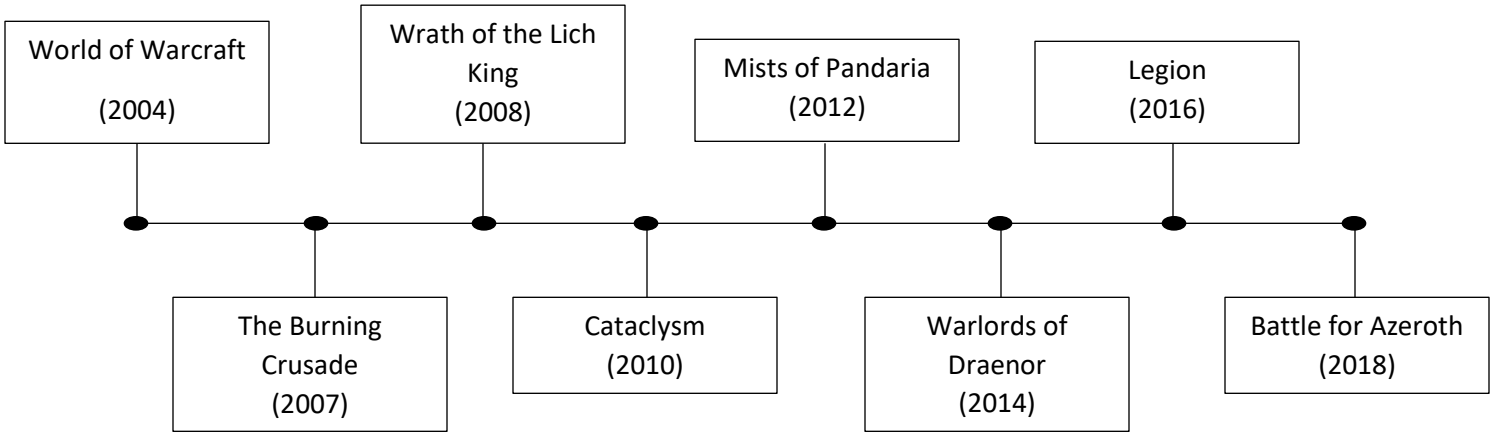
World of Warcraft was released in 2004 (worldofwarcraft.com) and gained huge popularity all around the world with a peak of 12 million subscribers during the second expansion *Wrath of the Lich King* in 2010 (Tassi, 2015). In WoW players play as either The Alliance or The Horde, the two opposing factions in the game world. While there is no one goal or end condition for the game, there are several activities that players may participate in such as *raids* and *dungeons*[1], as well as *Player versus Player (PvP)*[2] battles (worldofwarcraft.com). Many aspects of these activities among others have changed during the years as new expansions have been released, and the reactions have not always been positive (Reddit). As of now there have been six expansions to WoW, all adding to the pre-existing game in some way. In order to understand how these features have changed the game, and thus player motivations, a brief history of the main changes made to the official game is in order. Then, to understand the purpose and need for alternatives a look into the phenomenon that is private servers is done.

2.1 Historical overview of the game

During its 14-year long history World of Warcraft has gone through multiple major changes that should be briefly discussed as they directly relate to the thesis. Below is a general timeline of the expansions (Figure 1) followed by brief explanations as to what these expansions changed once they were released. Because the game is in a state of continuous flux it is impossible and impractical to list every change made to the game. This thesis focuses on those that are hypothesized as having the most relevance in terms of changing player motivations.

[1] Raids and dungeons, also called *Player versus Environment (PvE)*, are content where players form groups of different sized to battle monsters designed by the development team.
[2] PvP is content where players battle each other and test their skills against human opponents.

Figure 1 – Timeline of expansions to World of Warcraft



Vanilla WoW launched in 2004, followed by seven expansions listed above. The first big change to the core experience of the game was the introduction of **The Dungeon Finder** (Figure 2). Introduced in Wrath of the Lich King, the dungeon finder gave players the option of queueing up for a dungeon and being teleported inside once the group had been made by the tool. This change is significant because now players did not have to traverse the world to reach the dungeon, nor use the game's chat channels to look for other people – a task that would sometimes take hours.

Figure 2 – The Dungeon Finder Tool in Battle for Azeroth (2019)

Wrath of the Lich King also introduced **achievement points** into the game, a system that rewarded players with points whenever they completed a certain task. The harder the task is the better the reward. Easy ones reward 5 to 10 achievement points whereas harder achievements also reward titles or items such as mounts or pets in addition to points.

While **flying mounts** had been in the game since The Burning Crusade, before Cataclysm they were restricted to new zones introduced in the expansion and required players to reach the level cap to use. Cataclysm was arguably the biggest expansion WoW has ever seen; almost every zone and quest was remade, and flying mounts were introduced to the "old world" (Vanilla WoW's zones) becoming usable at level 60 (the player level cap then was 85).

Towards the end of Cataclysm, **Raid Finder** (Figure 3) was added to the game as well. This was to offer those players who did not have time to play the game enough to commit to raiding (forming groups of 10 to 40 people to combat the hardest challenges the game has to offer). Raid Finder would group players much like the Dungeon Finder and allow players to see the raid content – if

at a reduced difficulty (grouping up with complete strangers is probably not the most optimal approach for large scale coordination that raids often require).

Figure 3 – The Raid Finder Tool in Battle for Azeroth (2019)

Raids and dungeons have also seen some changes. In Vanilla raids and dungeons only had one difficulty. Since then heroic, and later mythic, versions of both were added to provide more challenge to those wanting it while also offering an easy version for those who were more interested in merely seeing the content. Raid size has also fluctuated almost every expansion. In Vanilla raids required either 10, 20, or 40 people depending on the raid. Since then the largest raid size was reduced to 25, and then set to anywhere between 10-30 people when flexible raid sizes were implemented in Mists of Pandaria. The latest addition to the raid sizes is the current mythic difficulty which requires 20 people. Today, raids can be anywhere from 10 to 30 people when the difficulty is either normal or heroic, and 20 if the difficulty is mythic.

It is no surprise that classes have also gone through many changes in 15 years. Without going into too much detail, in Vanilla classes were not balanced well, meaning that some were

objectively better than others in terms of playability no matter the skills of the player. Each class also had a very unique skill set, offering something that other classes could not. For example, warlocks were the only ones that were able to summon (or teleport) players to a dungeon. This also meant that players playing the warlock class were burdened with the reality that they always needed to run to the dungeon to summon others. After Vanilla summoning stones were added to the entrances of dungeons and raids for everyone to use. Players could click on the stone and with the help of two friends they could summon the rest of the party there. The mage class had a similar skill; they could teleport to any capital city in their own faction and create portals for their party members. While mages can still create portals, today capital cities have portals for everyone to use, trivializing the mage's once unique skill. A similar thing has happened with *buffs*, beneficial spells classes could cast on themselves and others. Over the years these buffs have been consolidated, some have been removed from the game, and some have become auras meaning that they are always on. In Vanilla, the shaman class put down totems that enhanced everyone's abilities by a large margin – now most of those buff totems have been removed or changed so that they only affect the shaman themselves.

These are just some of the changes that have happened but give some indication as to how the game has evolved during the years. The changes chosen for comparison were decided based on the hypothesis that the game has moved to a more single-player experience. It could be argued that all of the changes made to the game have been towards a smoother gaming experience (summoning stones), improving the "quality of life" of players (flying and removing multiple buffs that had to always be recast after a while), and catering to a wider audience (adding difficulty levels to dungeons and raids). This thesis will nevertheless argue that some these changes have negatively affected the MMO experience that WoW previously had. A large focus is put on community, since arguably most of these changes have somehow affected it, directly or indirectly.

2.2 Private servers, what in the World (of Warcraft)

The term private server is widely used to refer to servers that emulate the gameplay experience of online games. In the case of World of Warcraft, such an emulation is done on the ManGOS (Massive Network Game Object Server) engine which has been operational for over 10 years (getmangos.eu). Blizzard has made it so that anyone can download the data and files needed for World of Warcraft for free, but in order to get access to the scripts that run everything inside the game a player needs to pay a subscription and log in to the official servers hosted by Blizzard. What the private servers do is utilize the base files that are freely available to anyone and offer users to log in to their own servers. The ManGOS engine supports a variety of languages, such as C, C++, VB.Net, and MySQL which are then used to reverse engineer the scripts necessary for the game to resemble the official version. It should be noted that it is very much illegal to ask for money for providing private server services, and thus the work is done *pro bono*. Nevertheless, it needs to be stated that a vast majority of private server developers have enabled donations on their websites in exchange for in-game items (Reddit). Others only offer cosmetic improvements whereas some go as far as offering the best items available in-game. Of course, players are not directly buying in-game items, they are buying points which can then be exchanged for these items.

As was discussed earlier, each expansion has added something new to the game while simultaneously taken something out as well. All private servers are based on the last patch of the expansion they are emulating. World of Warcraft started with version 1.0. Every patch, major or minor, that was added became 1.**1**, 1.**2** et cetera. Minor patches are added after the major patches as 1.12.**1**. When a new expansion was released the version of the game changed from **1**.x to **2**.x. Private servers that emulate the *Vanilla* version usually emulate the last patch of the Vanilla version of the game, 1.12.1. There are a few reasons why the last patch of an expansion is always the one being used. First, the last patch of a specific version is simply the most polished and bug-free, but without data from the next expansion. Secondly, the last patch contains all the data of that expansion – 1.12.1 contains all the data from 1.1, 1.2, etc. When private servers release new content such as raids or PvP areas, all the necessary data is already downloaded on the players' computers (Reddit). If private servers were to start from the first patch of an expansion, every player would have to update their client every time new content is added to the game. What is important to note is the fact that private servers do not run the most recent

expansion of the game due simply to the fact that scripting such large amounts of new mechanics takes time and effort. The act of scripting such data is largely an act of mimicking what the development team at Blizzard are doing, but without having access to their databases or team sizes.

Private servers are not homogenous. There is a clear distinction between *blizzlike* servers and *funservers*. The latter include changes such as increasing the maximum level cap to 255, having custom monsters (or *mobs*), and custom events. They deviate from the real game to a much larger extent than the custom events hosted on blizzlike servers, although the term lacks a clear definition (Ownedcore). The emphasis on funservers is to break the traditional rules of WoW. An example of a funserver is Heroes WoW, which advertises itself as having a "unique server concept never seen before". As an example, Heroes WoW offers 17 different playable races. As a comparison official World of Warcraft offers 14 at the moment, with 4 unlockable subraces. Heroes WoW also has custom instances and dungeons where players can e.g. farm for gold, appearances, and custom armor sets. In addition, new zones such as the Mall have been added that do not exist in the official game. The term *Blizzlike* refers to private servers that emulate the official release version of any given expansion as accurately as possible (Greyson, 2016). An example of a blizzlike server is Kronos WoW, which hosts the 1.12 version of the game and aims at being as true to the original as possible (Kronos). And without one private server, Nostalrius Begins, there would arguably not be an official Vanilla server being released by Blizzard, nor would the author have felt inspired to write this thesis. Nostalrius was the biggest Vanilla server in the private server scene for over a year before Blizzard legally forced them to shut down. Nostalrius, operating on patch 1.12.1, had over 800,000 accounts made with 150,000 of them active at the time of the permanent shutdown (nostalrius.org). After the shutdown players of Nostalrius signed a petition (change.org) to Blizzard asking them to develop official legacy servers. The petition got 280,065 votes and was arguably a major motivating factor behind Blizzard announcing to bring back Classic WoW.

This thesis aims at providing an analysis of the differences between blizzlike private servers and official servers of World of Warcraft by conducting a survey about what players like to do in the game. In light of recent news that the company behind World of Warcraft, Activision Blizzard, is

working on a *Classic* version, the purpose of this thesis is to offer a look into the reasons why there is such demand for the original version of WoW among the playerbase. The purpose of the analysis is to determine what makes World of Warcraft, and to an extent an MMO in general, enjoyable.

According to a poll (Carter, 2013) the most liked expansion for WoW was Wrath of the Lich King (37.6%), with The Burning Crusade (23.25%) second, and Vanilla (12.49%) third. The reason why Wrath of the Lich King is not the version of private servers analyzed for this thesis is three-fold. First, due to the authors extensive research and experience of the Vanilla version of the game it was the logical choice. Secondly, Vanilla is the version that Blizzard is re-releasing, so it is the most relevant of the versions during the time of writing this thesis. Thirdly, by studying the first and the latest version we can see the start and end points of development. This offers a clearer outline of the changes made to the game. With that being said, it would appear that private servers have been filling a gap in demand and could be seen as a natural development to the game. RuneScape is among the most notable to officially go in this direction. In 2013 they announced Old School RuneScape (Gerhard, 2013) that would operate parallel to the newest installment. It would seem that Blizzard is now following the same trend with the release of WoW Classic planned for the summer of 2019 (wowclassiccountdown.com).

As the discourse concerning private servers tends to highlight the fact that they operate on grey, if not downright illegal, areas, it should be stated that the motivation for this thesis is to focus on understanding what the reasons people play on private servers that emulate earlier versions of WoW are. In no way does this thesis try to justify or condone the use of private servers or argue over their legality.

3. Literature review

World of Warcraft has had the attention of the academia for over a decade and thus works such as *Digital Culture, Play, and Identity: A World of Warcraft Reader* (Corneliussen and Rettberg, 2008) should be mentioned here as well. This critical anthology, among a myriad of other studies done on the game, show just how much attention World of Warcraft has had during its lifetime. There has even been a scholarly guild formed inside the game to share ideas and talk with likeminded people (Corneliussen and Rettberg, 2008). One of the motivations for this thesis is the lack of studies done on how World of Warcraft has evolved during its 15-year journey and how it could be argued that its target audience has changed tremendously as well. In order to study this, this thesis analyzes private servers that mimic the gameplay of World of Warcraft as it was in 2004. With the announcement of World of Warcraft Classic due to mass appeal by players, the matter of studying different versions of WoW should be acknowledged as a vital link in understanding player enjoyment.

Player type theories offer a useful framework for comparison between versions of the game. Among these theories is one of the earliest – Bartle's taxonomy of player types (Bartle, 1996). Bartle created his taxonomy based on players of MUD's (Multi-User Dungeons) – early text-based games and the ancestors of today's MMORPG's which he was a part of developing in the 70's and 80's (Sloane, 2000). Even though Bartle's taxonomy has been widely criticized for lacking empirical data and being restrictive in implementation it offers a good basis for a comparative survey study, as the aim is not to prove Bartle right or wrong, but to frame different activities in the game in a concise and comparable way. Among the critics is Nick Yee (Yee, 2007), who created his own model that he supported with empirical data. The main reason why Yee's model was not used was because it consists of multiple subcategories which in turn require a large amount of survey items to clearly differentiate in the data. There were concerns about the retention of individuals taking the survey, and so no more than 20 items were preliminarily planned. In addition, Bartle's model still has its uses in clearly defining different activities that players can participate in. In addition, MMO's are a close relative of early MUD's (Marczewski, 2013). The

adaptation of the model, then, offers good grounds for analysis and discussion of the results of the survey.

As the study is highly driven by personal experiences, the role of community, and its positive influence as an intrinsic motivator are discussed as well. Seeing as World of Warcraft's private servers have existed largely outside of the academic eye, a study done on another MMO can be used to support the study and offer a look into the phenomena of private servers. What private servers of Ragnarök Online have done offers an interesting comparison, as they appear to have arrived at similar conclusions using a different path.

3.1. Bartle's taxonomy of player types

In "Hearts, clubs, diamonds, spades: Players who suit MUDs." Richard Bartle (1996) distinguished four player types of MUD's. According to Bartle, there are four easily identifiable types of players: the *Killers*, *Explorers*, *Achievers*, and *Socializers*. The Killers are keen on engaging with other players and showing off their superiority in combat. The Explorers not only explore the game world but will also push the physical limits of what the game allows players to do. In Bartle's words they "dig for information". The Achievers get satisfaction from showing off what they have accomplished in the game, be it items or feats. The Socializer, on the other hand, enjoys playing with friends and sharing their in-game experiences with others. A player may shift between all four types but usually has a primary type, and "will only switch to other styles as a (deliberate or subconscious) means to advance their main interest." (Bartle, 1996).

Following its publication and the surge in popularity of MMORPG's, Bartle's taxonomy has been successfully used in online role-playing games due to its original target games, the MUD's being the precursor of the MMORPG genre (Taylor, 2009). World of Warcraft has had content for all four player types ever since its original launch, but the type of content has arguably changed over the years. It is important to note these aspects from both versions of the game by providing examples for all player types. It is also crucial to note that with an MMO this big the examples chosen do not constitute everything the game has to offer for each player type, they were chosen

by the author based on their relevance to the analysis of differences in Classic and current World of Warcraft.

3.1.1 Bartle's taxonomy in Vanilla WoW

Vanilla World of Warcraft was in many ways a different game to what World of Warcraft is today. For **the Explorers** the world was geographically smaller than what it is today, but traversing it took more time. Players had limited means of transportation – walking, using flight points, or investing in a mount. Mounts came in different speeds. The cheaper mount allowed the player to move at a 60% increased speed from their normal walking pace. The expensive mount enabled players to traverse the land at 100% increased movement speed. In addition to these, zeppelins and boats offered transportation between the two islands that were separated by a large body of water impossible to swim across. The mage class also had means to create portals to capital cities, but only by first visiting them by other means and talking to the portal master in each city to learn the spell. The scarcity of fast travel options made the world seem bigger and offered more content for the Explorers. In addition, many quests in Vanilla made you travel to multiple places around the world, such as the class quests that each class could complete at set levels.

The Achievers were after feats that would make other players jealous. The surest way to do this was to raid to obtain the best items in the game. This is also a good example of shifting between multiple types, as raids required co-operation with up to 39 other people. Transmogrification, a way to change the physical appearance of the items you were wearing, did not exist in Vanilla. This meant that if you were wielding that weapon from the hardest boss in the game, everyone knew how good you were. Raids only had one difficulty setting, so there was no doubt who had achieved the most.

The Socializers were offered multiple chat channels similar to the current version of World of Warcraft, there were the city's chat channels such as Trade channel, meant for trading items, and the Looking For Group channel that was used for finding players for dungeon groups. The guild channel was between the players in the same guild, and often the ones players spent the most time playing with. The party chat was for smaller groups, and raid chat for raid groups. All of

these channels exist currently in World of Warcraft, some just with different names. Still, having witnessed private servers, it can be said that many of them share one difference to current World of Warcraft, the "world" chat. In World of Warcraft, players can create a chat channel by typing /join [name here]. The world chat has been created in all of the private servers that the author has been a part of. The function is similar to those of the Trade and Looking For Group chats, but instead of only working and being visible in cities, the world chat can be seen anywhere. This makes for a more enjoyable playing experience, as all players joined in on the world chat are connected and can socialize through it. Furthermore, the core structure of the game was supportive of social play. Players were more dependent on other classes starting from the amount of group quests that required a set composition of players to be achievable. This also ties into previously mentioned differences between classes. If a player needs to go from the Undead capital Undercity to the Druid trainer in the Tauren inhabited Thunder Bluff, they can ask a mage and offer a few gold coins in exchange for a portal to their destination.

The Killers in World of Warcraft found their place in the player versus player content. World PvP happens sporadically where the two factions bump into each other, and battlegrounds are the place to go to if players want to earn a lot of honor. Battlegrounds are zones where groups of players ranging from 10 to 40 go against each other. They have a set goal, capture the flag, kill the opposing faction's leader, or take control of certain areas on the map. The way in which players were rewarded was the honor system. In Vanilla, the honor system rewarded players with titles for killing players of the other faction [3]. Arguably Killers were not always interested in PvP per se. As per the definition of Killers, they were most interested in causing harm and grief to other players, something that could be done to your own faction as well. One way of achieving this would be to *killsteal*[4] from members of your own faction. Essentially, whoever does damage to a monster first will also reap the rewards no matter who exerts more effort into killing said monster.

[3] The factions, Alliance and Horde, had separate titles starting from "Scout" for the Horde and "Private" for the Alliance and ending in "High Warlord" and "Grand Marshall" respectively (Wowwiki).
[4] Killing a monster and gaining the experience and/or rewards from doing so before someone else

3.1.2 Bartle's taxonomy in Battle for Azeroth

The Explorers have more areas and secrets added into the game every time another expansion is released. In Battle for Azeroth, players can discover treasures and find secret mounts that sometimes take groups consisting of tens of thousands of players solving the puzzles leading up to them. One of the big differences to Vanilla WoW is the addition of flying mounts. Fast travel has been trivialized with the addition of flying mounts moving anywhere from 280% to 310% of the normal movement speed. At the start of an expansion, however, flying is prohibited until a set number of tasks has been done. One of these tasks is to explore every new zone introduced in the expansion, encouraging players to explore the world on foot before taking to the skies. Explorers also try to figure out the "internal machinations" of the game, something that years of tuning and bug fixing has made all the less interesting. Arguably, this is an aspect that will always die out, no matter the game. Once it is known it no longer provides pleasure for the Explorer. It is near impossible to artificially create this effect.

The Achievers have probably had the most content added into the game, per their interests. Dungeons and raids have multiple difficulties which means that after defeating the content once the Achiever can up the difficulty and go again, earning even more fame and even greater items. The addition of *achievement points* is another way for Achievers to fulfill their deepest desires. The achievement points are tied to many other achiever-oriented activities, such as defeating the hardest level of difficulty, collecting a myriad of mounts, pets, or cosmetic items to name a few.

The Socializers have had a place in World of Warcraft from the start, and the newest expansion is no different. With Blizzard acknowledging communities that form outside of the game and adding an interface for those into the game is what Socializers want. Now you do not have to limit your social circles to your friend's list of your guild, you can be a part of different communities based on your other interests in the game as well. But on the other hand, when cross-realm functionality and the *Group Finder*-tool were added to the game it meant the end of many levels of socializing. When in the past players were forced to socialize in order to achieve certain goals, now it is possible to never talk to another player and clear all current content, albeit

on the lowest difficulty level. If a Socializer wants to access a dungeon by using the dungeon finder, they may find that other players in their party do not want to converse as much as they would.

The Killers are an unavoidable evil in World of Warcraft and could be argued to extend not only to those that like killing players but to those who like *trolling* (Wikipedia) others as well (sometimes these two mean the same thing). In the past it was up to the player's server choice whether they wanted other players to be able to kill them (and vice versa). PvP servers were designed to allow so-called *World PvP* to take place. This meant that every member of the other faction was free game were you to cross paths in the world. On *PvE* servers this was not allowed, and players could only engage other players by entering *Battlegrounds* specifically designed for player vs. player combat. In the newest expansion, players can enable *War Mode* that allows them to engage in combat with other players. If a player does not have War Mode activated, they cannot be attacked. Bartle (1996) mentions, however, that usually what Killers do (cause distress to other players) is not of the other players' volition. Making it so the Killers cannot touch you unless you want them to might undermine what Killers enjoy doing.

These are just a few aspects of the two versions of World of Warcraft that have differences in how they are applied, but in both Bartle's player types can easily be identified as the targets of different types of content. These aspects are looked at in more detail in the analysis of what types of players enjoy World of Warcraft now and in the past. Bartle's player types are noted, because they provide a distinction between different aspects of World of Warcraft, and how they game has approached them at different times. Additionally, Bartle's definitions guide the formulation of the survey items in so that each broader category is addressed.

3.2. Nick Yee's empirical model of player motivations

Nick Yee stated in his article "Motivations of Play in Online Games" (2007) that Bartle's taxonomy of player types has underlying assumptions that have not been empirically tested. According to Yee, Bartle supposed that "preference for one type of play suppressed (e.g., Achievement) other types of play (e.g., Socializing or Exploring)." This means that two or more types might correlate with each other. Bartle's categories were deemed useful for the purpose of this study in so that they provide a clear categorization of player types. Whether or not these categories correlate or overlap will be seen in the analysis, but is not the main aim of this thesis.

Yee conducted a Principle Components Analysis (PCA) with 40 items to study player types in MMO's. The games he used were EverQuest, Dark Age of Camelot, Ultima Online, and Star Wars Galaxies. In total, 3000 answers were documented. Yee's categories differ from those that Bartle suggested, but they share the same themes overall. He found ten categories with Eigenvalues over 1 (table 1) that accounted for over 60% of the variance. after which he conducted another PCA that produced three main categories with eigenvalues over 1. The factor analysis revealed that play motivations in MMORPGs do not suppress each other as Bartle suggested.

Table 1 – Yee's player type categories

Achievement	Social	Immersion
Advancement Progress, Power, Accumulation, Status	**Socializing** Casual Chat, Helping Others, Making Friends	**Discovery** Exploration, Lore, Finding Hidden Things
Mechanics Numbers, Optimization, Templating, Analysis	**Relationship** Personal, Self-Disclosure, Find and Give Support	**Role-Playing** Story Line, Character History, Roles, Fantasy
Competition Challenging Others, Provocation, Domination	**Teamwork** Collaboration, Groups, Group Achievements	**Customization** Appearances, Accessories, Style, Color Schemes
		Escapism Relax, Escape from RL, Avoid RL Problems

Following Yee's methodology, PCA was used in this thesis to check for correlations as well as test how well Bartle's categories can be used in a survey. In short, a factor analysis is deemed useful for the purpose of this study and helps when comparing the categories to find differences in the two versions of World of Warcraft. While they differ from Yee's, it was decided that Bartle's

categories be used in this thesis. Yee's model is discussed because of its relevance to player type studies, and to highlight the reasons why Bartle's model was deemed more functional for the purposes of this thesis. Among these reasons, as was discussed at the beginning of chapter 3, was the amount of survey items needed for Yee's model to provide accurate data. Concerns about the retention of individuals taking part in the survey was what lead to the conclusion that there should be no more than 23 survey items to maximize the amount of complete responses.

3.3. Collaboration as a foundation

Collaboration plays a major role in MMO's, especially when talking about the early days when Vanilla was popular. While the role of collaboration is still there, it has shifted in importance. When comparing two versions of World of Warcraft collaboration and socialization should be the main focus.

Collaboration has been studied in World of Warcraft early on in its history (Nardi and Harris, 2006). It is worth noting that while the literature is quite dated, it discusses the notion of sociality in a game that was arguably built around collaboration in the first place. The appeal of earlier, older, versions of the game in the private server community speaks in favor of looking at the social aspect of World of Warcraft as it was in the past.

The article lists numerous ways that collaboration inside the game can be achieved. Firstly, they talk about *buffs*, beneficial spells casts on friendly players that do not require more than a simple button press, but at the same time do not yield experience or benefit the buffing player in any way. It is noted that this is the simplest form of a kind act, one which serves to "maintain a mutually beneficial atmosphere…" (Nardi and Harris, 2006, p.151). Secondly, players can *kill assist* another player. Sometimes a player might encounter another player in a situation where they are about to be killed by a monster, or even by a player of the opposing faction in some cases. The player passing by can help make the kill and save their ally a run from the graveyard, a place where characters spawn as ghosts only to search for their mortal remains and come back to life. They continue by mentioning that the game's chat channels offer a wide variety of

possibilities for collaboration from simply asking for directions to requesting aid from other players.

The aforementioned collaboration usually happens in a positive atmosphere, Nardi and Harris (2006) add. When talking about interaction between players there is, of course, negative interaction as well. On a server flagged for PvP, members of the opposing faction can interfere with your playing by killing you, sometimes repeatedly, in an act called *ganking* (Urban Dictionary). Nardi and Harris (2006) point out that other players are active actors in your playing experience, not just part of the landscape.

It should be noted that the article is from 2006, a time when even leveling your character was an ordeal and required a large amount of collaboration to not be an endless lonely grind. Since then the game has evolved into a more single player-oriented experience, at least in the leveling phase. As the author has experienced the game in all of its stages it can be said that the leveling phase has shrunk from lasting weeks, or even months, to just days. Excluding random *buffing* and *kill assisting*, real collaboration in the most recent version is largely found at the maximum level.

The term *structured collaboration* is used (Nardi and Harris, 2006) when talking about more planned and long-term forms of collaboration. A large part of the game is built around *structured collaboration*, from different size groups for different activities to guilds and even commercial buying, selling, and trading of items. *Parties and raids* are the baseline for group collaboration, offering a shared channel for communication, shared experience, and sometimes shared quest items (one monster drops an item, but everyone in the group can acquire it, requiring that the monster be only killed once) for faster completion. It can be seen from Nardi and Harris' article (2006) that collaboration in parties was more common in the early days of the game. In addition, low-level groups were formed for simple quests to make them easier to complete. Since then, the majority (if not all) group quests have been removed from the game paving way to a more single-player gaming experience.

The term *social affordances* has been defined by Bradner (2001) as "the relationship between the properties of an object and the social characteristics of a given group that enable particular

kinds of interaction among members of that group". Crenshaw and Nardi (2016) apply the term to World of Warcraft. They highlight the fact that the changes made to World of Warcraft as new content has been released have altered the *social affordances* of the game in a way that has reduced player-to-player interaction. One example is the *Looking for Group*-interface, which took away the former group finding via the game's chat channels by introducing algorithms that connect players to groups in late 2006. Crenshaw and Nardi note this as being one of the major changes that reduced interaction and made the game more faceless, as players no longer had to contact other players directly. This was later changed to *Group Finder*, which automatically connected players not only from their own server, but from other servers as well. Crenshaw and Nardi state that as people were able to find groups from a larger pool of players, it also made communication unnecessary, as "…players were no longer concerned about maintaining reputations and relationships with people from different realms because they were strangers whom the player was unlikely to see again." (Crenshaw and Nardi, 2016, p.3).

The second major change that Crenshaw and Nardi point out was the implementation of cross-realm zones that connected multiple realms. The reason for this was that some realms had less players and felt barren to players looking to interact with other players. The downside, according to Crenshaw and Nardi, was that even though players were able to quest and communicate with members of different realms, some things were prohibited, such as trading between group members that were from different realms. They note that this "removed some opportunities for sociality." (Crenshaw and Nardi, 2016, p. 4).

We can see the change WoW has gone through. Andrea Braithwaite (2018) studied the role of multiplayer in World of Warcraft and its observed shift in meaning. As the author has experienced the "old" WoW as well as the current one, it is not hard to observe that collaboration is not as encouraged as it once was. Braithwaite highlights that this trend has started to resemble those seen in real-life, where others are seen as hinderances to success while players "see themselves as entrepreneurial subjects" (Braithwaite, 2018 p. 119). She continues to define the entrepreneurial self as something that is "defined by accumulation and productivity, being for himself his own capital, being for himself his own producer, being for himself the source of [his] earnings'' (Foucault, 2004/2008, p. 226, quoted in Braithwaite p. 124-125).

Braithwaite analyzes the deterioration of collaborative play and the steady progress towards exalting the entrepreneurial self in three different areas of World of Warcraft: world events, the matchmaking system, and phasing. The first gameplay aspect she focuses on are world events. From the beginnings of WoW up until the fourth expansion (Cataclysm), world events have been designed to engage players in collaborative play (Braithwaite, 2018). Preceding the launch of a raid or an expansion, a large threat has emerged in the world that has required everyone's collaboration to be vanquished. Braithwaite highlights the fact that early world events such as the opening of *The Gates of Ahn'Qiraj* (Gamepedia) did not have level requirements, which meant that everyone on the server could participate to the best of their capabilities. In contrast, current world events have been more focused on individual involvement, and usually only maximum-level players can take part in them, such as the event *Battlefield: Barrens* (Braithwaite, 2018). She also adds, that in the case of *Battlefield: Barrens*, player involvement played no role in the completion of the event. Once the event had been active for a set period of time it ended in victory. *The Gates of Ahn'qiraj* had a set amount of supplies that the players on each server had to gather together in order to complete the event. Every player could contribute to completing the event faster.

Braithwaite then moves on to discuss the matchmaking tools implemented throughout WoW's history. One of the matchmaking systems implemented in the third expansion *The Wrath of the Lich King* in 2008 made it possible that players could queue for a dungeon and be teleported directly in with other players that they probably had never met before. The Group Finder tool was developed to make grouping up easier but had unforeseen consequences on collaborative play. As Braithwaite, quoting Foster in Royce (2015), mentions, before cross-server grouping people tended to have a good knowledgebase of players on their server. If someone was rude or stealing items they had a reputation on the server, and players usually did not want to group up with said individuals. This meant that players no longer needed to spam Looking for Group-chat in a major city in the hopes of finding a group, but at the same time they could not decide who they were grouped up with. Braithwaite argues that while WoW still requires players to form groups, the "game design choices are reframing group play as an individual activity" (Braithwaite, 2018, p. 128). This, she notes, is partly due to the buff players receive in 5-man dungeons based on the number of strangers they group up with. For every stranger, players receive a 5% bonus

to their health, damage, and healing. This discourages grouping up with friends for they are not strangers and will not grant you your buff.

Lastly, Braithwaite highlights the detrimental impact of phasing as being one of the destroyers of collaborative play in WoW recently. Phasing is a technology that makes the world around a player change when they advance in the storyline, or complete actions that influence the landscape. It also means that every other player can no-longer physically see that player unless they are grouped up with them or have completed the same actions. Some areas of the game are purposefully phased so that every player is in their own "instance" of that area. (Braithwaite, 2018). She continues that phasing is also a way to emphasize the player's own actions and impact on the world. This was highlighted further in the previous expansion, *Warlords of Draenor*, where every player controlled their own fortified base with follower NPC's they could send on missions, raw materials, and crafting hubs for all their gear needs. These *garrisons* meant that players had little reason to ever interact with others outside of dungeons, raids, and battlegrounds (Braithwaite, 2018).

Braithwaite puts it best when she states that "WoW has, over the course of its lifetime, trended away from multiplayer and toward multiple players, away from collaborative effort in favor of measures of individual achievement." (Braithwaite, 2018, p. 131). The plummeting number of subscribers from over 10 million at the beginning of *Warlords of Draenor* to 5.6 million after just nine months is indication that the direction in which Blizzard has been taking the game is not well received by the playerbase, Braithwaite argues. Collaboration is a fundamental part of the analysis of WoW on both private servers that mimic the collaborative gameplay that WoW once had, and the newest expansion, *Battle For Azeroth* that seems to be lacking in it in some aspects.

3.4. The approach of Ragnarök Online

In 2010, a qualitative study was conducted on *Ragnarök Online (RO)* private servers (Debeauvais & Nardi), a Korean Massively Multiplayer Online Game (MMOG). Their method included looking at two websites where private server data could be found, examining data conducted in surveys

on the official server, and conducting informal, semi-structured interviews with eight private server players as well as one administrator on a medium sized private server.

Debeauvais and Nardi (2010) found that players reported more enjoyment on the private servers due to adjustments that accommodated a more social atmosphere, and fine tuning that better "fit the needs" of players. The improvements that they deemed as bettering the social atmosphere are looked at first.

The first improvement was the implementation of commands for players. Players have access to a chat tool inside the game that they use to communicate with others. This chat tool also works as a command console that accepts different commands (Ragnarök Wiki). By typing @who on the RO private server one can see how many other players are online at that time (Debeauvais and Nardi, 2010). The second improvement was the addition of the *Control Panel*, which is accessible from the private server's website. It scours the game database and shows character information without needing to log in to the game. According to the study (Debeauvais and Nardi, 2010) this was one of the most liked and used functionalities that is lacking from the official servers. When talking to an administrator they also mentioned raising the maximum number of players that can take part in sharing XP (experience points). Instead of 12, players could form groups of 15 for experience gain. They also increased the XP rates for all players. These changes effectively promoted sociality by making grouping up a more worthwhile activity. Debeauvais and Nardi also reported that on another private server they observed the level range of suitable players was raised which meant higher level players were more likely to help lower level players.

The study (Debeauvais and Nardi, 2010) also noted technical changes to the game mechanics. They note that "rate-1" means that killing a single monster grants a set amount of XP. The two private servers they studied were both rate-50 servers, which means that a single monster grants 50 times the experience it would on the official servers. This means that leveling is faster and occupies less time from the players, leaving more time to accomplish other things in the game. They point out that the rates can go as high as 100,000, which makes grinding levels rather pointless. In addition to the increased XP rates, two NPCs were often found on higher rate private servers – The Warpra and the Healer (Debeauvais and Nardi, 2010). These NPCs offer fast travel

and healing to players. The study notes that for some private servers with low player population these NPCs are a way to compensate for the lack of players playing the Acolyte class which can teleport players much like the NPC can. Nevertheless, these NPCs are still found even on high population private servers, maybe due to more players enjoying playing by themselves and not bothering to find a group to play with, Debeauvais and Nardi (2010) argue. Another technical improvement they discovered was the @autotrade command, which makes the Merchant class an NPC for a period of time while they sell their merchandise to other players. All selling is then transferred to the server and the player can log in on a different character while their Merchant character automatically sells their stock.

Interestingly, looking at the approach Ragnarök Online private servers have taken it seems that many of the implementations have been made to make the game better than the official version. From the author's own experiences playing on WoW Blizzlike private servers[5] it can be said that almost the exact opposite is true, although "making the game more enjoyable by players" is the goal of both Ragnarök and WoW private servers. The term Blizzlike (as was discussed in 2.3) usually means that many of the *Quality of Life (QoL)* improvements made to the game later are absent from private servers. For example, finding groups on the private servers studied for this thesis was as it had been on the official servers in 2004 with the addition of the world chat which players can access anywhere in the world[6]. There was no group finder, players had to post a message in chat looking for players and then invite everyone manually. Today all of this is done by the server with the Group Finder tool.

On the contrary to RO, fast travel options are scarcer on Blizzlike private servers and it usually takes more time to travel between places than it does on the official servers. The original areas of World of Warcraft up until patch 4.0 (Cataclysm expansion) were a no-fly zone, and as the private servers studied here operate on patch 1.12.1 there are no flying mounts nor are there any added ways for fast travel. There are also no new customization options for players on these

[5] When referring to Blizzlike private servers the author is referring to Kronos and Light's Hope, the servers from which the data was gathered.

[6] The world chat is possible on official servers as well, as players can make new chat groups that others can join freely. Similarly to RO, this is an improvement to the official version of 1.12.1 that has been implemented only on private servers.

private servers. It seems that what Blizzlike private servers of World of Warcraft are doing is promoting authenticity of the old versions of the game and doing away with new quality of life improvements that Retail WoW's development team have implemented with a few small exceptions such as the world chat.

While there are clear differences in the approaches RO private servers and WoW private servers operate and achieve popularity, they do not differ in all aspects. For example, leveling rates are often increased on private servers, as they often tend to focus on the end game more than the grinding that WoW used to be. Nevertheless, there are servers that offer no increased leveling rates such as the ones that are analyzed in this thesis. Another thing that the two private server phenomena share is the amount of power the administrators (GMs, or Game Masters, in WoW) have. In addition, the administrators of RO private servers were felt to be "closer to the players" (Debeauvais and Nardi, 2010, p. 5) while surveys done on the official servers reported that the majority of players felt the administrators were not doing their job sufficiently. Compared with WoW private servers the same tends to be true. GMs are sometimes seen in the capital city hosting events for players. One such event was to locate the GM somewhere in the game world with the help of clues. The hardest clue gave the best reward were it enough for a player to locate the GM.

In conclusion, it is interesting to compare RO private servers to those of WoW because there seems to be a major difference in the needs of players and what appeals to them. The purpose of RO private servers is to improve upon the official game, whereas WoW private servers seem to strive to return the game to its roots when the game was arguably harder in some respects. This offers an interesting argument as to why people want to play on private servers. One of the obvious reasons would be because the community can improve the official game and modify it to better answer to players' needs. In the case of RO this seems to be the case. Looking at WoW private servers there needs to be a more in-depth analysis of what "improving" the game actually means. Based on the study of RO, and the lack of similarities between the two (in terms of the servers this thesis analyzes), making the game easier and adding *QoL* improvements does not always appear to make it more appealing to players. It can safely be said that Blizzlike WoW private servers running on 1.12.1 are not easier when compared to what RO private servers offer.

4. Methodology

The methodology used in the thesis include data collection with an online survey using a five-point Likert scale, data analysis using Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) to determine the relationships between the survey items, as well as Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to validate the findings of the EFA. After that an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) is conducted to find any significant mean differences between the factors found in different game versions.

4.1. Using a quantitative online survey

An online survey was deemed the choice of approach due to the nature of the data required, and the physical limitations of reaching as many individuals as possible. A quantitative study was chosen not only because of aforementioned physical limitations, but also because it supports objectivity and allows observing broad patterns using large data sets (Goertzen, M. J. 2017). In other words, because players of World of Warcraft are spread around the globe, and the goal is to compare the frequencies of certain activities in two versions of the game, a quantitative online survey was the logical choice for the method of this study.

Joel Evans and Anil Mathur (2005) list possible pros and cons of conducting a survey online that were also taken into consideration. The flexibility of an online survey was among the important factors. Implementation of a survey to a wide pool of potential respondents proved to save both time and energy – data collection, including posting a beta version of the survey which was improved upon, took no longer than a week. Possible downsides were taken into consideration as well, although many of the cons listed did not apply, such as problems related to tech limitations (if your computer runs World of Warcraft it will run a webpage with a survey on it). On a more serious note, Evans and Mathur note that a possible skewness of population might be a factor. This was countered by focusing solely on the experiences had in the game and deciding not to collect demographic data. Choosing to collect demographic data would offer an interesting angle in a further study, but at the same time would answer different research questions than

were asked in this study. The survey was also kept as simple as possible to counter any confusion in the answering process – this is why a Likert scale was used.

4.2. Constructing the survey

The survey consists of 23 multiple choice items that are designed to map the interests of players of both BfA and Vanilla World of Warcraft. With the help of the literature review as well as the theoretical background, the results are analyzed and differences and similarities between the data sets are studied. The complete survey is attached to the end of the thesis for reference. As has been stated before, the main goal of the survey is to find differences in the player types of both versions of World of Warcraft to see how the game has changed during the years, and what types of players it attracts currently. On a larger scale, the results can point to the direction of what players expect from MMO's currently.

The items are constructed so that each alludes to a certain player type – Explorer, Achiever, Socializer, or Killer. The survey format was inspired by Nick Yee's 2007 study on player motivations and designed to categorize players into the four player types that Bartle (1996) proposed. The items focus on player activities in-game and are rated from 1 to 5 with 5 being the most enjoyable and 1 being the least enjoyable. The initial idea was to ask players whether they play on both private and official servers simultaneously, but after some thought it was deemed unnecessary for the purpose of this study.

The first step was to post open-ended questions on Reddit to narrow down the best approach for conducting a survey (Puronlahti, 2018). A pilot survey with 20 items was done that received approximately 50 individual answers. Based on feedback from the pilot, one survey item was (thankfully) reworded: "Playing with friends over playing ~~with~~ by myself". In addition, three items were added to the survey: "Obtain the best gear in the game", "Collect mounts, pets, toys, etc.", and "Feel a sense of completion playing the game" (Puronlahti, 2018). After the pilot phase the final version of the survey with 23 items was posted to the subreddit r/KronosWoW, to the subreddit r/lightshope, and on Retail WoW's subreddit r/wow. Both Kronos and Light's Hope are servers dedicated to Vanilla, so the results from both of these are combined and compared with

the results from Retail. The reason for choosing Reddit is its popularity as a forum platform across continents and servers. From Vanilla's perspective it proved to be much more active than actual forums of these private servers. From Retail's perspective it offered arguably the biggest pool of players, as Retail WoW forums are divided by continents (meaning EU forums are separate from US forums et cetera).

The survey was created in Google Forms, and the data analyzed using SPSS. A total of 1022 individual answers were recorded from Retail, out of which 1000 were complete answers. One extreme case (only 1's answered) was found and removed on the basis that given the variety of items it is more likely that laziness was the cause than any other factor. From Vanilla, a total of 629 individual answers were recorded out of which 617 were complete. Again, one extreme case (all 5's this time) was removed for similar reasons as previously. Both data sets had missing answers which were thus removed from the data set completely. Given the total amount of answers collected no further action is required concerning the missing answers in terms of skewing the results.

It needs to be mentioned that the survey was aimed at players of World of Warcraft, but for reasons stated above all answers came from Reddit, and so every individual recorded belongs to the subgroup of "players who play World of Warcraft and use Reddit". The reason for targeting Reddit was mentioned earlier – it simply offered the best effort to maximum possible respondents' ratio.

Next, a factor analysis is conducted to check whether the groups of activities stay intact, or whether some items do not belong in those groups. Bartle's taxonomy is very vague and as Yee (2007) mentioned, did not count for overlapping of player types. The survey items – because they were inspired by Bartle's typology – focus on specific activities in the game, and thus a closeness to Bartle's should be found. It can be argued that it is still crucial to see whether these groups come true in the actual data. Comparison is made with the factor analysis, correlations, and then comparing the mean difference of resulting groups with ANOVA.

4.3. Utilizing factor analysis and analysis of variance

Factor analysis is a “multivariate statistical procedure” (Williams et al. 2010) that can be used to reduce a larger set of variables into fewer, smaller ones. It can also be used to establish “underlying dimensions between measured variables and latent constructs” which in turn helps process and improve upon current theory. In other words, factor analysis helps reverse engineer the theory, illuminate the problematic variables, and thus help refine the model. In this case the model consists of four categories, and each survey item was engineered to fall into one of these categories. The factor analysis is then done to see how well the items (also called variables) fall into their expected categories (also called factors). Lastly, Williams et al. (2010) mention that factor analysis works to make sure that a self-reporting scale (where participants answer without researcher interference) appears valid.

Simply put, factor analysis takes a data set and finds related variables in it that can be clustered together. These larger variables are called factors. The reason for using a factor analysis was to validate the groupings of items so that larger-scale comparisons could be made. Much like Yee did a factor analysis to find his player type categories, here it is done to validate the categories chosen for comparison.

The two data sets were combined for the purposes of the factor analysis. Average Cronbach’s alpha = α of > 0.7 was recorded from the combined dataset. After combining the data, a random split was made and an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was run on the first half, and a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) on the second. This was done to discover whether the initial groupings Explorer, Achiever, Killer, and Socializer that Bartle theorized could be found in the data and compared between game versions.

Lastly, one-way ANOVA is used to compare groups defined in the factor analysis between their counterparts. This is which compares the means of both Vanilla and Retail player type groups to find out any significant differences (Howell, 2002). One-way ANOVA uses one independent variable and one or more dependent variables. For this study the independent variable is the game version (Vanilla and Retail) and the dependent variables are the player type groups found

in the factor analysis. The goal is to find out whether there is a significant difference in means between game versions.

5. Results

5.1. Exploratory Factor Analysis

The purpose of EFA is to observe *possible* latent factors (Fabrigar and Wegener, 2011). Only factor loadings of > .3 are reported. Principal axis factoring with a promax rotation (Kappa = 4) and Kaiser normalization was used to conduct the EFA (Table 1). The results produced five factors with eigenvalues of over 1 explaining 55% of the overall variance. These results were unsatisfactory, because the fourth and fifth factors also had low item loadings with just one being over .6 and some being as low as .35. There was also an item that was found in two factors. According to Costello and Osborne (2005) any item is considered to cross-load if the two values are within .17 of each other in different factors. In this case the values were within .22, but the instance was considered to indicate a fault in the model. The scree plot provided a cutoff point at the sixth factor just below the eigenvalue of 1 (Figure 1) and thus provided little additional help. The first three factors all produced a reliable Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha > 0.7$), but factors 4 and 5 had $\alpha = .290$ and $\alpha = .623$ respectively. Sampling adequacy for the data set was 0.796; good according to Hutcheson & Sofroniou (1999). Correlations between the items were big enough to justify EFA.

Table 1 – Showing factor loadings over .3

Exploratory factor analysis **α = .720**					
	Factor				
	1 α = .790	**2** α = .770	**3** α = .786	**4** α = .290	**5** α = .623
Obtain the best gear available in the game	.763				
Be the best at what I do	.761				
Maximize my output and performance over others	.731				
Reach the level cap as soon as possible	.642				
Feel a sense of completion playing the game	.512			.308	

Choose my class based on its output and performance	.344				
Making new friends in the game world		.737			
Casually chatting with other players		.696			
Joining a guild so that you can find more people to play with		.653			
Forming groups even if the task does not necessarily require one		.651			
Playing with friends over playing by myself		.499			
Helping others, even if they do not ask for help		.458			
Provoking other players in some manner			.859		
Causing distress to other players			.828		
Intentionally misleading players in some way			.748		
Killing significantly weaker or worse players than myself			.470		
Collect mounts, pets, toys, etc.				.765	
Learning about the lore to make sense of events in-game				.524	
Choosing my class based on its feel, class fantasy, etc.				.364	
Testing the limits of the game world					.592
Finding easter eggs/secrets within the game				.351	.571
Theorycrafting to understand the hidden mechanics of the game					.560

Discovering new or "unreachable" places in the game world	.445

Extraction Method: Principal Axis Factoring.

Rotation Method: Promax with Kaiser Normalization.[1]

1. Rotation converged in 6 iterations.

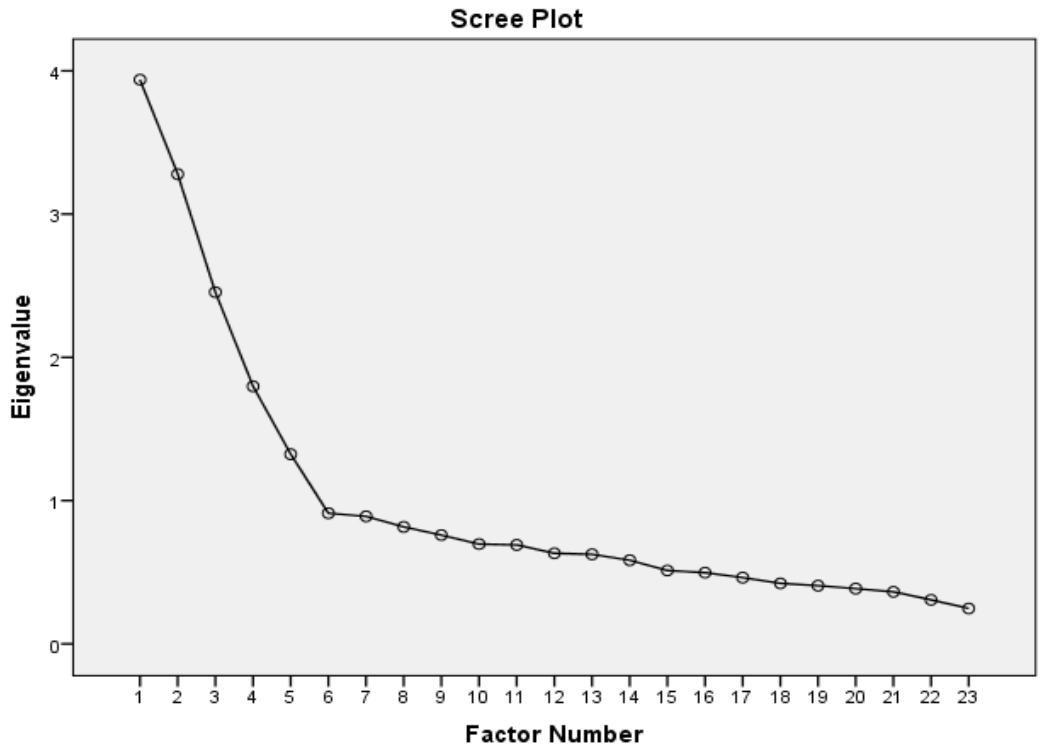


Figure 1 – Scree plot of the cut-off point for major factors

The initial analysis provided us with five factors. Because the theory suggests that we should expect four factors instead of five, and because Eigenvalues have been criticized for over-estimating the number of factors (Velicer et al., 2000), the next step was to force four factors and assess the robustness of the results. Forcing the factors resulted in factors 4 and 5 merging into a single factor comprising of variables related to exploration. The resulting Cronbach's alpha of 0.736 for the overall scale is sufficient, and three of the four factors had an $\alpha > .7$ with only Explorers falling short with .633 (Table 2). Nevertheless, the resulting factors correspond well with the theorized player types and provide a good basis going further.

Table 2 – Forced factors with loadings over .3

EFA with forced factors α = .736				
	Factor			
	Achievers α = .777	Socializers α = .770	Killers α = .786	Explorers α = .633
Obtain the best gear available in the game	.746			
Maximize my output and performance over others	.745			
Be the best at what I do	.742			
Reach the level cap as soon as possible	.546			
Theorycrafting to understand the hidden mechanics of the game	.475			
Feel a sense of completion playing the game	.425			
Choose my class based on its output and performance	.418			
Making new friends in the game world		.735		
Casually chatting with other players		.688		
Joining a guild so that you can find more people to play with		.651		
Forming groups even if the task does not necessarily require one		.650		
Playing with friends over playing by myself		.497		
Helping others, even if they do not ask for help		.454		
Provoking other players in some manner			.869	
Causing distress to other players			.839	
Intentionally misleading players in some way			.740	

Killing significantly weaker or worse players than myself		.454	
Finding easter eggs/secrets within the game			.814
Discovering new or "unreachable" places in the game world			.622
Testing the limits of the game world	.334		.456
Learning about the lore to make sense of events in-game			.455
Collect mounts, pets, toys, etc.			.387
Choosing my class based on its feel, class fantasy, etc.			.353

Extraction Method: Principal Axis Factoring.

Rotation Method: Promax with Kaiser Normalization.[1]

1. Rotation converged in 5 iterations.

5.2. Confirmatory Factor Analysis

After the EFA the next thing to do was to run a CFA on the other half of the randomly split data to confirm and validate our findings. The four factors obtained via EFA were utilized to run the CFA. Initial analysis including all variables provided the following results: Modification indices (M.I.) – set to show values of over 20 – showed covariances between multiple variables and high M.I. scores, highest being 67.260. In order to improve model fit, a revision was made and two variables – "Collect mounts, pets, toys, etc." and "Choosing my class based on its feel, class fantasy, etc." were removed before comparing the results. Justification for this was the fact that the item loadings of the variables in regards to the Exploration factor were only 0.29 and 0.3 respectively, which is less than the lowest adequate loading of 0.32 (Costello and Osborne, 2005). Additionally, the variable "Collect mounts, pets, toys, etc." was originally theorized to be a part of the *Achievement* player type, which would indicate that the survey item does not fit the model. The EFA showed a low loading of .334 in the Achievement group, but this was deemed too low

to justify using the variable. Regardless, individual analysis of the item should still prove to be interesting, useful, and something to be learned from.

The final CFA conducted provided "borderline" results in terms of model fit. CMIN/DF value of 4.074 was within the acceptable range of < 5 (Wheaton et al., 1977), CFI = .884 was barely below the usually accepted value of > .9 (Schreiber et al., 2006), PCFI of .762 was acceptable at > .5 (Hooper, Coughlan, & Mullen, 2008), RMSEA of .063 was fair at < .08 (MacCallum, Browne, & Sugawara, 1996), and PCLOSE < .000 did not satisfy the required minimum of > .05 (Kenny, 2012). The fact that the survey is brand new and not tested yet makes it less than perfect but having borderline results in terms of model fit as a brand-new survey it is safe to say that the results can be analyzed further without large concerns for validity.

5.3. Analysis of variance

Table 1 – One-Way ANOVA results

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Socializers	Between groups	26.129	1	26.129	38.383	p < .001
	Within Groups	1099.404	1615	.681		
	Total	1125.533	1616			
Explorers	Between groups	5.782	1	5.782	7.436	p = .006
	Within Groups	1255.745	1615	.778		
	Total	1261.527	1616			
Achievers	Between groups	1.013	1	1.013	1.628	p = .202
	Within Groups	1004.565	1615	.622		
	Total	1005.578	1616			
Killers	Between groups	.784	1	.784	1.219	p = .270
	Within Groups	1038.434	1615	.643		
	Total	1039.218	1616			

From the table (Table 1) we can see that game version had a significant effect on Socializers and Explorers at the $p < .05$ level for the three conditions [$F(1, 1615) = 38.383$, $p < .000$] and [$F(1,1615) = 7.436$, $p = .006$] respectively. A more in-depth look is conducted in the next chapter where both the significant and non-significant differences are discussed. No statistically significant differences were found between game types for either Achievers or Killers. Nevertheless, individual items should show differences between Vanilla and Retail.

Examining the results shows that Socializers, the category that was hypothesized to differ the most, proved to do so. The other category, the Explorers, significantly differed in mean as well. A more thorough look indicates that the mean of Socializers in Vanilla was 3.59 and 3.33 on Retail, the highest difference of all the player type categories. This further proves the hypothesis that Vanilla contains more elements that make socializing important for gameplay, and an analysis of individual items in the Socializer category should provide more insight into the differences

between the game versions and how the game is played. Explorers were the other category that provided significant differences in means between game versions – Vanilla = 3.01, Retail = 2.88.

The Explorers were a surprising player type to score higher in Vanilla than Retail. Looking at the games side to side, the one offering new content on a regular basis should be more intriguing to those interested in exploring the ins and outs of World of Warcraft. But it seems that the opposite seems to be the case. The 15-year-old version is more favored in the Explorer category.

Next, the categories are compared between the two data sets and a more in-depth analysis is conducted on why different versions of, arguably, the same game attract different behavior. The hypothesis was that socialization plays a major role in Vanilla World of Warcraft – this will be put to the test with the collected data.

According to Yee (2007), Bartle's player types do not suppress each other as he stated but are co-existing features. This is important to note, as the purpose of this study is not to arrive at a polarized statement such as "Socializers play Vanilla, Achievers play BfA", but to highlight which features are more prevalent in players of each version. In other words, the results are aimed to be more in the lines of "the gameplay of one version can be argued to be more favorable to those who enjoy the socializing features offered to them than to those who enjoy achieving features", after which arguments as to why this might be are made.

6. Discussion of findings

This chapter discusses the findings in light of the differences in the gameplay of both versions. The findings provide valuable information about the current trends of World of Warcraft and its player base, and what types of players they should expect to play the official Classic servers when they are released in the summer of 2019.

6.1. Preliminary assumptions

The main preliminary hypothesis was that social players would fare better in Vanilla due to copious amounts of interacting and socializing needed to experience most things in the game. This pointed to the fact that answers from Vanilla would lean more towards high scores in the Socializer items. At the same time, as Retail WoW is gaining more and more playable content, exploration was hypothesized to give higher scores on Retail than on Vanilla. More content means more places to explore and discover. It should be noted that for the sake of clarity the terms Explorer, Achiever, Killer, and Socializer by Bartle (1996) are used for those groups of players who are categorized into their respective groups in the factor analysis. The term does not indicate that any player is solely an Explorer or an Achiever for example but refers to a higher-than-average interest in behavior typical to a certain type.

Another early presumption was that overall, people who answered highly on the Achiever items would also answer higher on the Socializer category, and this would be enhanced in Vanilla where socializing was almost obligatory for most of the activities an Achiever could engage in. An example of this type of activity was the act of obtaining the best gear in the game (both PvE and PvP require some form of collaboration). In the end no significant correlation between Socializers and Achievers was found. Other cross-group correlations that were hypothesized were the relationship between Achievers and Explorers, but again, comparing these groups between game versions was more fruitful, and analysis of single items was deemed more valid than cross-group comparison within a game version. Preliminary analysis of the data suggests that despite

hypothesizing cross-group correlations, these correlations were low, and it was decided that pertaining to cross-server analysis would provide more fruitful results.

At the risk of stating the obvious, the items were formed with the intention that they indicate a specific type of behavior. For example, an individual who answered 1 on "Joining a guild so that I can find more people to play with" might still belong to a guild, but for different motivations that were sought here. Analysis of answers with values of 4 and 5 in this item only provide results indicating that those individuals joined a guild for at least the reason stated in the survey item.

6.2. Categorical discussion of findings

After the initial survey analysis, some assumptions can be made to explain the differences in these two data sets. Most of the literature review focuses on social aspects of MMO's, and the preliminary hypotheses that disparity can be found proved to be true. The Achiever and Killer categories did not differ much between the game versions. Nevertheless, single items in those categories offer interesting results as well and are included in the discussion. Some items were found to not fit the model, and others changed from one group to another.

6.2.1. Explorers of the world

The first category discussed is exploration. Interestingly, the ANOVA results show a significant difference between Vanilla and Retail versions. Vanilla players favored exploration more than Retail players. As has been stated earlier (chapters 2.1. and 3.1.), there have been many changes to the role of exploration in World of Warcraft that might explain the difference between the versions. In Vanilla, exploration was a part of the core gameplay experience. Everyone had to explore if they wanted to achieve anything. In order to do dungeon content in a group, players had to physically travel to the dungeon by traversing the world either on-foot, or if a player had amassed enough currency, on a mount. On the rare occasion that the group had a Warlock could they summon players directly to the instance. In Retail, dungeons are accessible via the dungeon finder and require no exploration. From a game mechanics perspective, Vanilla offers more built-

in exploration that might deter players that do not enjoy it. Also, Crenshaw and Nardi (2016) mention that changes to the game have reduced player-to-player interaction. The diminishing role of exploration can be argued to be one of the causes of this as well. Players are less likely to encounter others in the game world when they rarely venture out and explore.

The Explorers category proved to be the most troublesome when conducting the CFA. Two of the variables: “Choosing my class based on its feel, class fantasy, etc.” and “Collect mounts, pets, toys, etc.” ended up being removed from the category as the item loadings did not merit inclusion. “Choosing my class based on its feel, class fantasy, etc.” was a vague item from the start, as it is hard to define what “feel” means in this context. This became apparent from the CFA where the variable did not produce robust results. The reasoning for including it at first was partly from Bartle’s (1996) definition of an Explorer: “Explorers delight in having the game expose its internal machinations to them… and figuring out how things work.“, and from Yee’s (2005) study where he found correlation between discovery and immersion. In a game like World of Warcraft, all classes have their own lore that tie into the gameplay that they offer; e.g. Shamans are attuned to the elements of nature and can use them to their advantage. It was hypothesized that players leaning towards the Explorer type would enjoy the finer details and, for the lack of a better word, explore the lore and mechanics of their character. There is an argument to be made to the contrary, where Explorers are more interested in the technical side of how things work. This is discussed more in 5.4.3, as “Theorycrafting to understand the hidden mechanics of the game” was found to have a stronger relationship with the Achievers despite being theorized belonging to the Explorers.

It should be said that while dungeons could arguably be meant for those who are interested in growing in power, as Yee (2007) stated there is overlap between player types. WoW has historically been successful in catering to many different types by offering activities that interest more than one type of player. It seems that World of Warcraft is moving away from an all-encompassing experience towards a more linear and singular one, much like Braithwaite (2018) argues in the case of world events. In modern WoW, low-level dungeons are nothing more than a quick way to level up, but in Vanilla every dungeon is important because the equipment players can obtain from them will help them immensely when leveling. The longer a player can wear

something they spent three hours obtaining, the more valuable it becomes to spend those three hours. In Retail that value is almost completely diminished as most leveling players are wearing gear they can purchase that levels up with them, called *heirlooms*.

The forced factor analysis revealed one instance of an item overlapping between two factors. The values for "Testing the limits of the game world" in Explorers and Achievers were within .122 of each other and can be considered to cross-load. The item can be interpreted to belonging in either – Explorers test the limits of the physical game world on their journey to find out how far can they go up a mountain that was not meant to be accessible to players[7], and Achievers may want to know how to make their character as powerful as the game allows[8]. A closer look (Figure 1) at the differences between Vanilla and Retail shows that this behavior is more common in Vanilla, surprisingly.

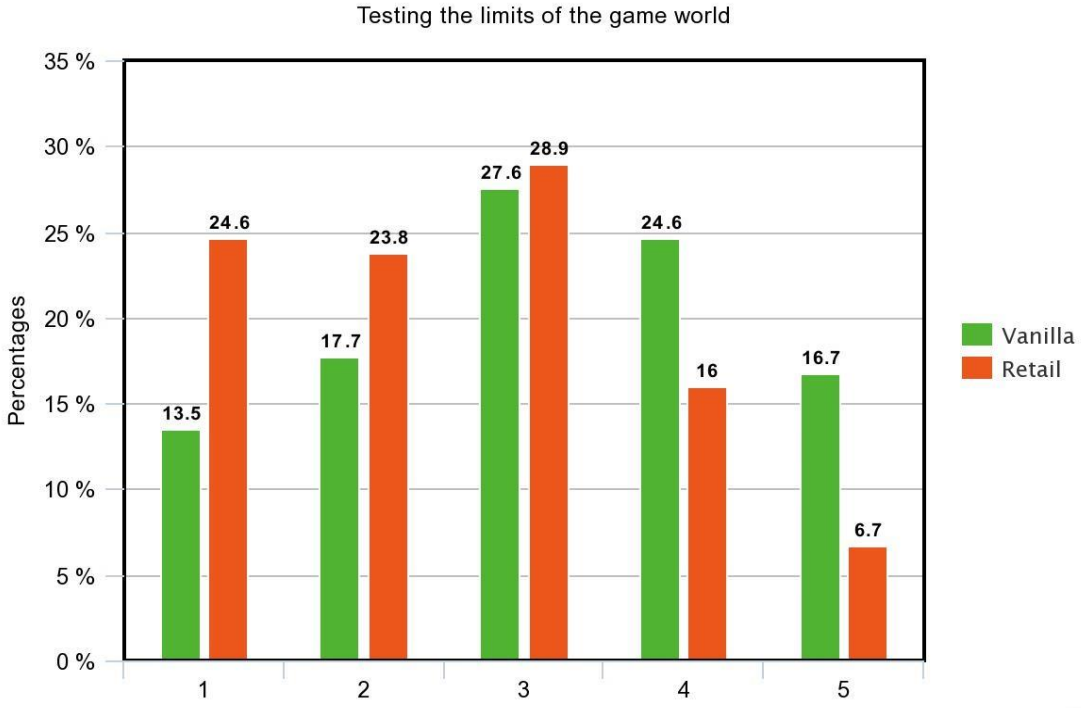


Figure 1 – 16.7% of Vanilla (n=617) players and only 6.7% of Retail (n=1000) players answered "5 = Enjoy the most" to testing the limits of the game world

[7] Players can jump over the whole mountain range and see a zone in development before promptly being teleported out by game masters.

[8] When Warlock players figured out that by cleverly using some mechanics they could outperform everyone else while wearing almost no equipment on their character, i.e. being naked.

Battle for Azeroth provided players with new zones to explore, and many hidden secrets to find. Even with more exploration-related content, Vanilla players were more explorer-oriented and interested in testing the game world's limits than Retail players. It can be argued that with the inclusion of flying, the world, while growing bigger, has actually shrunk in the eyes of players. There is no excitement in traveling to different zones when you can do so without fear of enemies attacking you, and at fast speeds – because you are flying. The lack of effort makes the rewards of exploration null. The decaying interest in exploration does not arise from flying only, though[9]. There are many factors that contribute to this phenomenon: First, there are more flight paths players can take per zone than there were in Vanilla. Second, everyone is able to afford a mount. Third, player power compared to the average enemy is substantially higher, which makes the threat of dying while exploring dangerous zones non-existent. On a larger scale, and because flying will be introduced into the game at a later time, Retail offers less incentive to go testing limits that, after some time, will not be limits any more. The same trend can be seen in "Discovering new or "unreachable" places in the game world", which is highly related to "Testing the limits of the game world", albeit the latter is not as constricted.

Collecting items in-game was first theorized as being a part of the Achievers, as it seemed to fit better with the definition that Bartle (1996) produced when he wrote that "Achievers regard points-gathering and rising in levels as their main goal…". Here points-gathering can arguably be translated to collecting measurable things, something the Achiever can have more of than others. Regardless, the analysis showed that collecting things had a stronger relationship with other exploration-oriented types of gameplay. This can be explained by a heavier focus on collection in Retail, where toys, items, and even mounts can be found by exploring secrets in the game world and are also vastly more abundant. The graphs for the raw data from both Retail and Vanilla (Figure 2) show that the relationship between Vanilla and Retail is very much negatively correlated, and reasonably so.

[9] Currently, players are unable to fly in the new zones introduced in BfA, although flying will be implemented in the future (Wowhead).

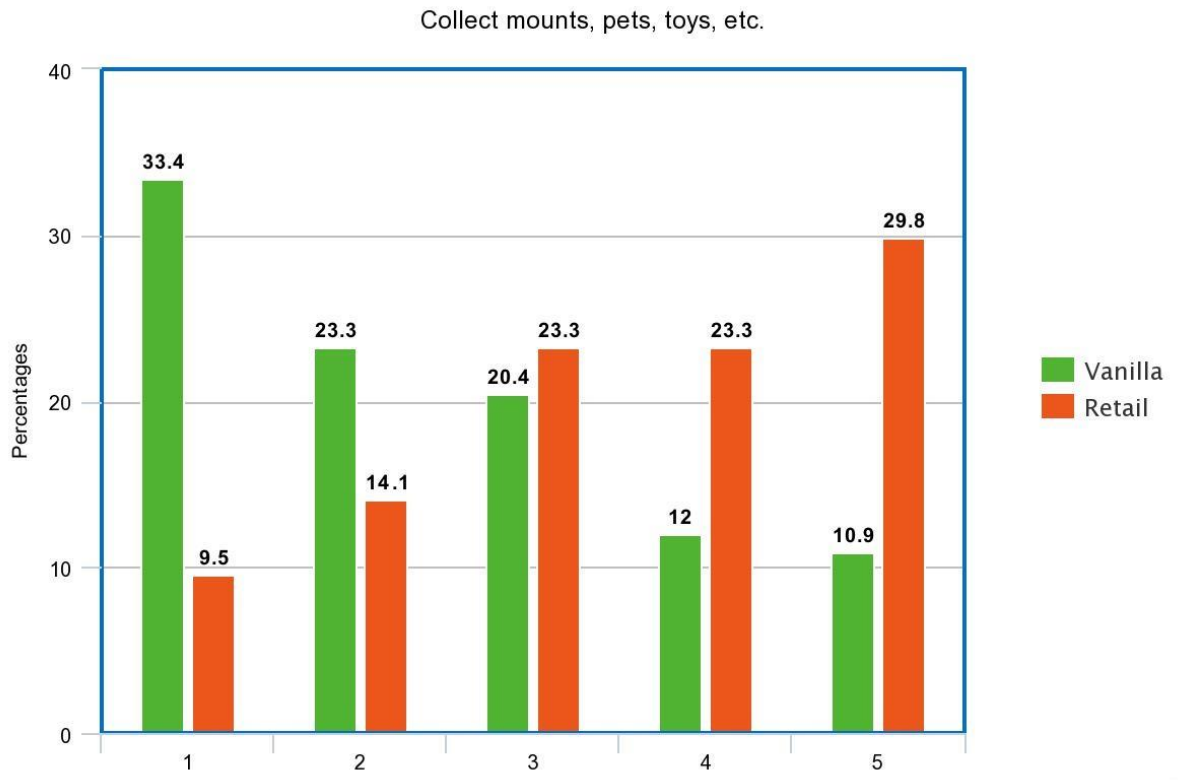


Figure 2 – Collecting items was enjoyed more in Retail (n=1000) – 29.8% of respondents felt it was very important to them

6.2.2. Socialization – having casual conversation and making new friends

The other, and most, significant mean difference was found in the Socializer group. The hypothesis that the role of socializing has changed proved to be true. Next, discussion is had on why differences can be found.

As World of Warcraft has evolved, every playable class has also evolved. This evolution has always been towards giving each class more power – to make them feel like they can handle situations on their own. It can be argued that as players continue to play on a single character it is reasonable to assume that at some point the character becomes powerful enough to survive on their own. But what this does is remove possibilities for social play. Nardi and Harris (2006) argued that social gameplay derives from the simplest acts a player can do. These include buffing friendly players with beneficial spells (make them stronger or provide survivability) or doing

harder quests together. One can argue that the reason the Socializer category in Vanilla measured a higher mean is from the removal of these small things. In addition, the implementation of game mechanics such as the dungeon finder tool can be argued to deter players from casual social play as Braithwaite (2018) also stated.

As was mentioned earlier, the survey items focused more on casual social behavior. “Forming groups even if the task does not necessarily require one” is a perfect example of this sort of behavior (Figure 1) and something that is highlighted by Nardi and Harris (2006) as well. It can be argued that a big part of this difference is players’ ability to survive easily on their own in Retail. In Vanilla, even when the task does not require a group, it usually makes things easier. It also speaks for players’ experiences playing the game in a group to be more positive than negative.

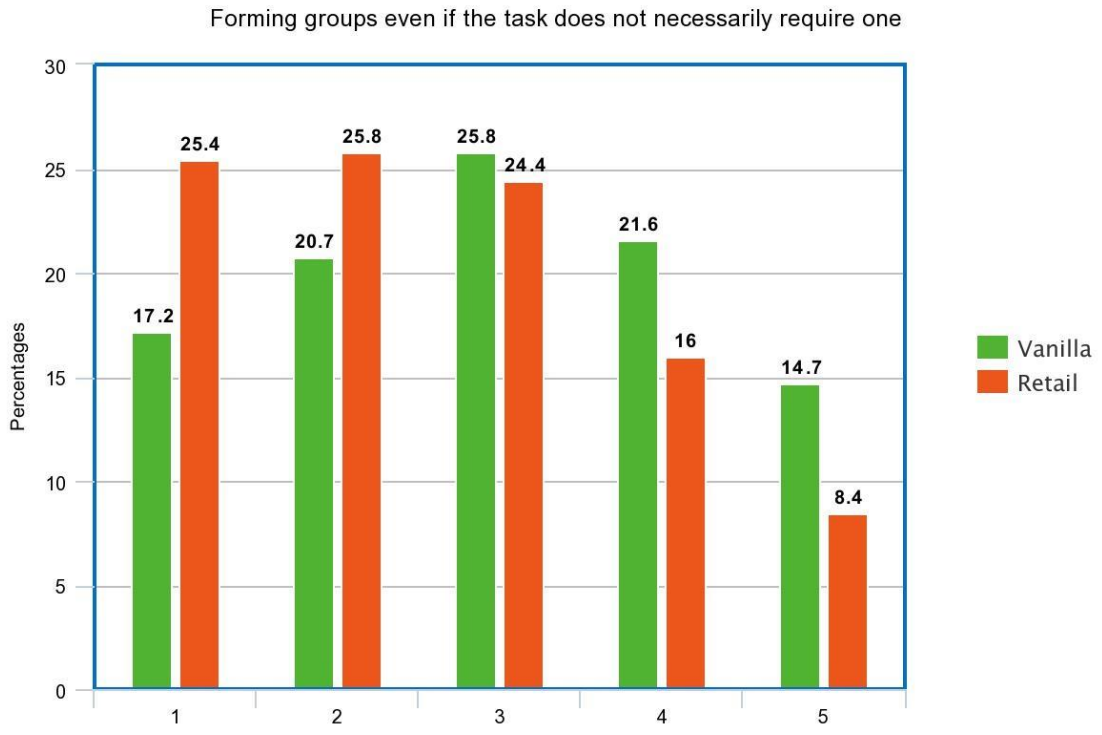


Figure 1 –14.7% in Vanilla (n=617) and 8.4% in Retail (n=1000) answered “5 = most likely” to forming groups even when not necessary.

Crenshaw and Nardi (2016), and Braithwaite (2018) argue that the group finder tool was a part of the reason socialization was less and less required as WoW developed. While it was stated that the tool discourages exploration, it has arguably also affected social aspects of the game.

Players are able to complete dungeons much faster, but almost always with total strangers as the tool groups players from different servers as well. Before multiple servers could be connected in this way (and later with server merges) people knew who was on their server. This created a sense of community that still arguably exists on private servers. If you build a bad reputation people are going to know who you are. If you build a good reputation people are going to know who you are and recognize your value.

As was stated earlier, low answers to the item "Joining a guild so that I can find more people to play with" do not mean they are not a part of a guild, but that their motivation for joining a guild is not to play with others. The idea that social players are more intrinsically motivated is not something this survey can answer, but it is something that would be interesting to study on its own more. There is a clear difference between social play in Vanilla and Retail WoW, and it might be an explaining factor in their decreasing subscriber numbers (this can also be speculated as Blizzard is no longer releasing subscriber numbers for WoW as was stated previously).

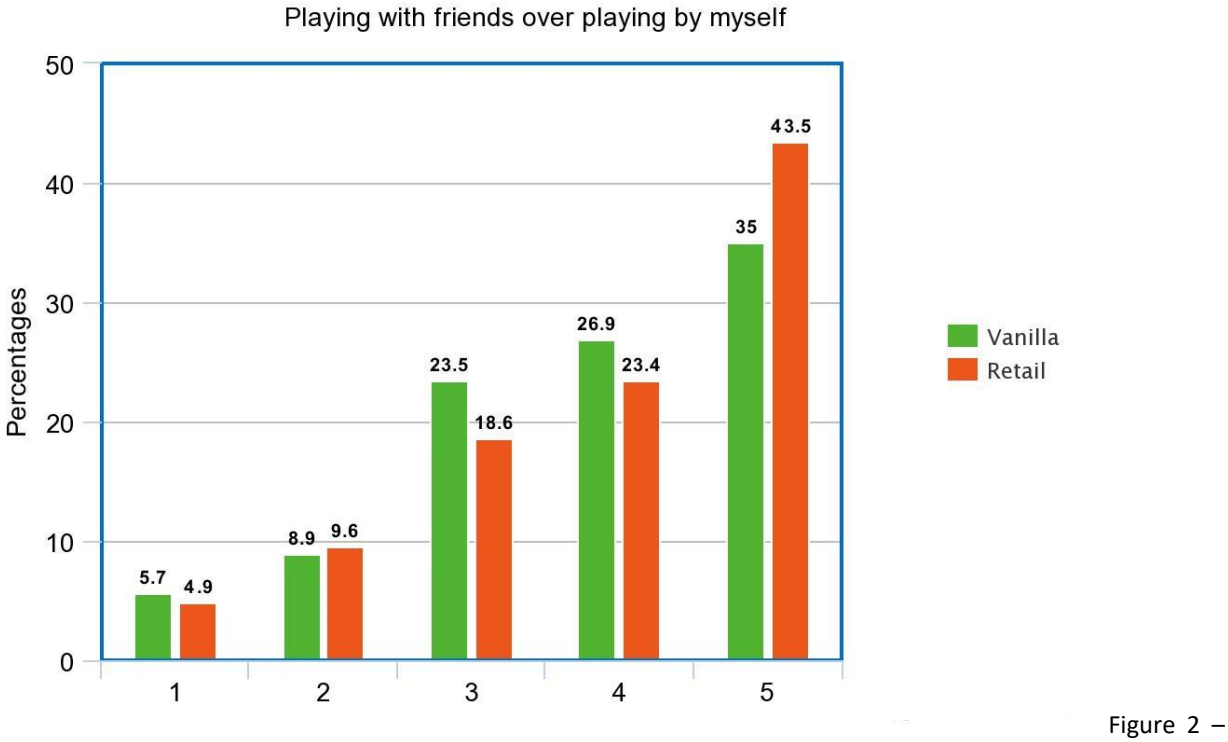


Figure 2 – 43.5% in Retail (n=1000) vs. 35% in Vanilla (n=617) answered "5 = enjoy the most" to playing with friends.

Players of Vanilla appear to more readily engage in casual social play. Crenshaw and Nardi (2016) argued that the social affordances in World of Warcraft have changed to no longer encourage

social play. By looking at “Playing with friends over playing by myself” (Figure 2) one can see that Retail players favor playing with their friends more than Vanilla players, and both groups report low percentages in answers of 1 and 2. The data here contradicts the overall findings that social play is more favored in Vanilla and needs to be studied further. When comparing these results with those of the item “Making new friends in the game world” (Figure 3) one can argue that while Retail WoW is still a multiplayer game and made to be played with others, engaging in social behavior with new players is more favored in Vanilla much like Crenshaw and Nardi (2016) stated. The same trend can also be seen in “Casually chatting with other players” (Figure 4) where Vanilla favors casual conversation more. Braithwaite (2018) argued similarly that the dungeon finder tool affected the way in which players collaborated with each other. The data here shows that there is a clear difference in players’ interest in meeting new people in the game world between Retail and Vanilla WoW. This explains the mean difference found in the ANOVA. It could also indicate that players of Retail WoW enjoy playing with friends they already know but are not as likely to establish new friendships in the game.

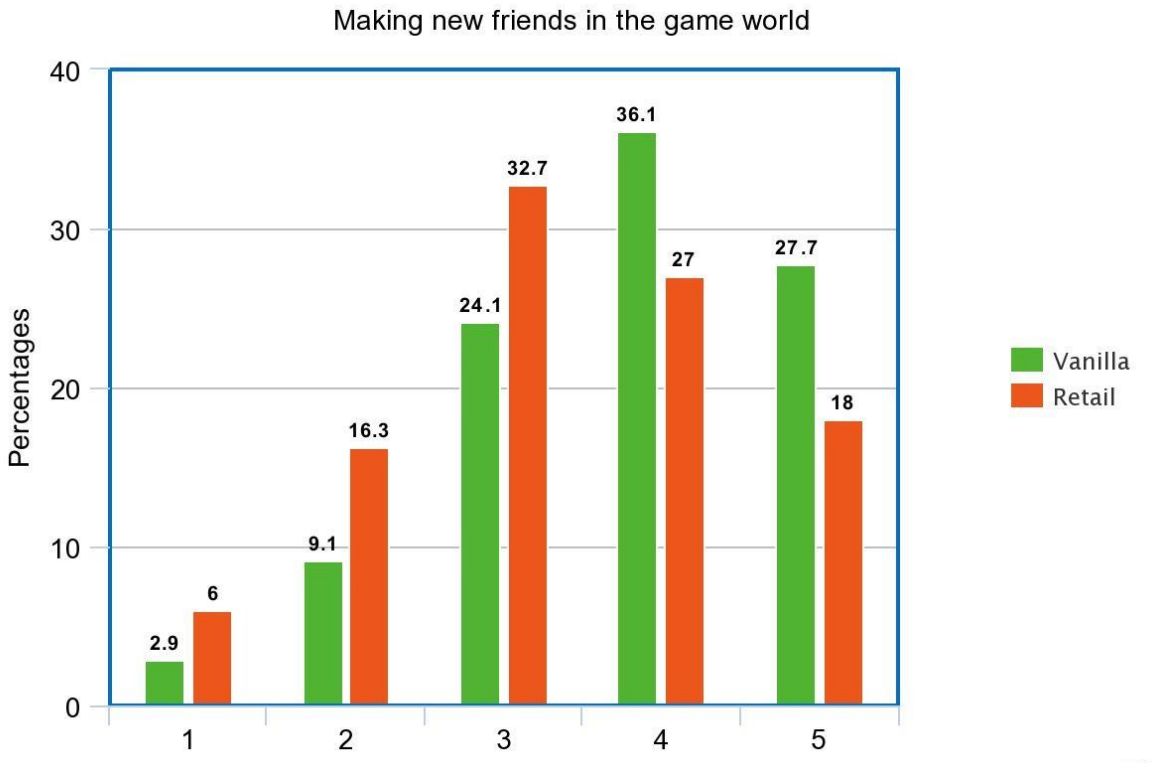


Figure 3 – Making new friends was more important in Vanilla (n=617) where 27.7% value it the most.

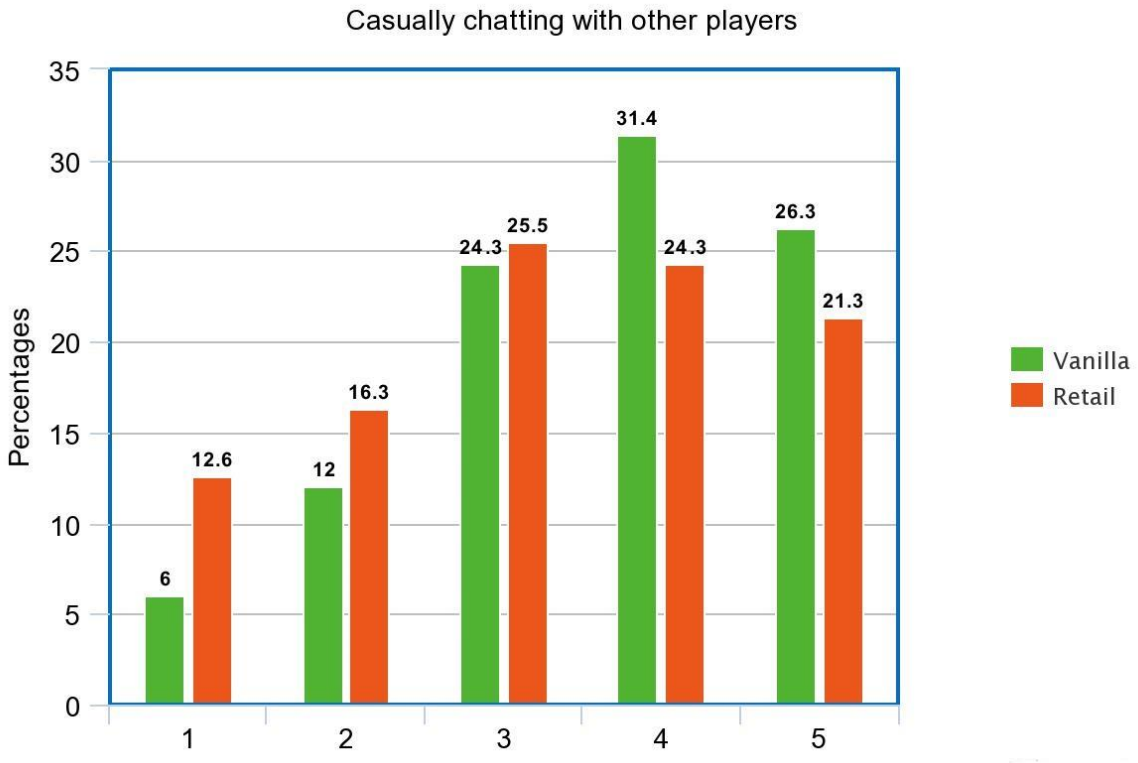


Figure 4 – 26.3% of players in Vanilla (n=617) engage in casual conversations often.

Lastly, the community around most private servers appears to be tightly knit (Reddit). Players take pride in being a part of a small community and at least on some level share the idea that Blizzard has deviated too much from what the game used to be. Blizzard Activision's decision to shut down one of the most liked private servers *Nostalrius* only strengthened this "bond" (Reddit). One could argue that this has made the community stronger and made the idea of being a part of a community even more significant. The reason this is important to notice is, that when Blizzard releases their own Classic servers, it is hard to say whether the community around it will resemble that of private servers or not. In other words, it is possible that events outside the game (e.g. Nostalrius shutdown) are at least partially responsible for the way private servers view their community and want to contribute in it, and not the game itself.

6.2.3. Achieving more, but for less

The game consists of a system mentioned earlier called Achievement points. Even though they share a name with one of the player categories it appears that they do not, according to the results, create more Achievers in the game. These points work as a reminder that players have achieved something. Only a minority derive pleasure from amassing achievement points in themselves as they offer nothing more than a big number on the achievement window (they cannot be used as e.g. currency). In other words, the points themselves do not offer any deeper rewards, the activities they are awarded from do.

As has been mentioned earlier (chapter 5.3), Retail does offer a multitude of ways to reward players for achieving something. So much so, that it can be argued to work against itself. Having many things to do might feel overwhelming and achieving something means less because there are so many other achievable things for players to choose from. Vanilla offers a fewer number of things to focus on, such as raiding or PvP, but both of these require dedication. If you want to achieve even a moderate level of success you need to sink in hundreds of hours of game time. Retail offers a more beelined progression towards mediocracy, with only the highest level of, for example raiding, being hard to achieve. And this is only when players hit the level cap.

“Theorycrafting to understand the hidden mechanics of the game” moved from the exploration group in the EFA and offers interesting insight into the hypothesis that Bartle’s definition of Explorers gives us. As was mentioned before, Bartle (rather vaguely) stated that Explorers are interested in knowing how the game works. *Theorycrafting* is the act of theorizing values within the game to come up with formulas of e.g. maximum theoretical damage output for a class with the best obtainable gear on. The reason it was first theorized to be something Explorers enjoy doing is simply because they enjoy finding out how the game works. In order for a player to be the best at what they do, they need to know how their class and the different damage calculations work. Nevertheless, the data shows that theorycrafting weighed heavier in the Achiever category and differences between Vanilla and Retail are discussed next.

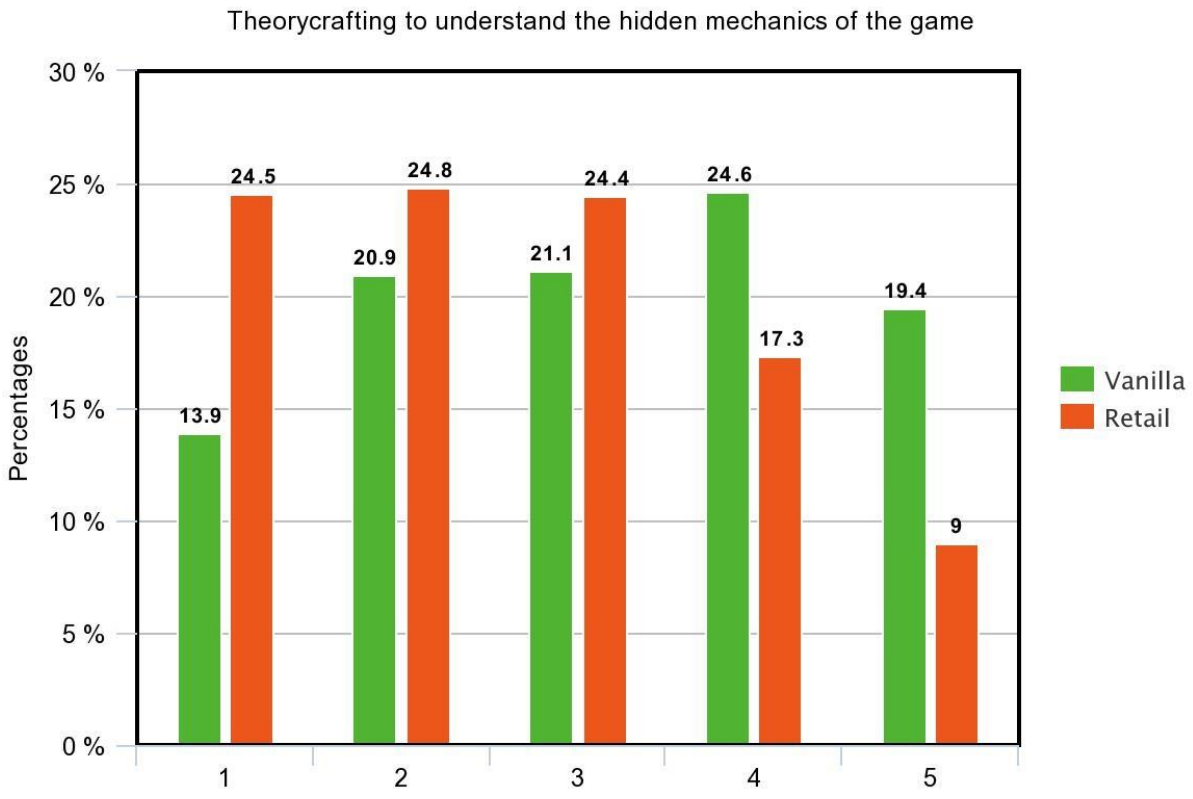


Figure 1. Theorycrafting was more important in Vanilla (n=617) with 19.4% of players engaging in it often.

Comparing "Theorycrafting to understand the hidden mechanics of the game" (Figure 1) between Vanilla and Retail offers interesting results. It seems that Vanilla players are more interested in theorycrafting than Retail players are. Now, one plausible explanation for this would be the way in which Retail has layered progression to cater to all players from the most casual to those who play multiple hours a day. It is possible to kill the final boss of a raid without putting in the time it takes in Vanilla where there is only one level of progress for everyone. The path of least resistance offers quicker rewards but is arguably less *rewarding*. The reason this is discussed is because the act of theorycrafting is highly related to improving your performance, something that is necessary when doing anything in the game on the highest level. Players need to have a very good understanding of how their class works if they want to conquer the hardest content in the game.

"Obtain the best gear available in the game" also provided interesting results (Figure 2). While ~33% of players considered it very important in Vanilla, only ~25% felt that way in Retail. This might be due to the same reasons already mentioned. Retail offers many gear options (as does

Vanilla) before players are able to obtain the best items available. The problematic feature lies in how similar easily obtainable gear is to that offered at harder difficulties. The gear looks the same (only the color is different), and offers everything the next level does, just with reduced numbers. From a motivational perspective, adding 5% more damage by doing the hardest content in the game is not rewarding enough. Players are awarded a title for killing the last boss of a raid on the hardest difficulty, but that arguably has very little motivation for players as titles are abundant and for example offer no boost to your performance.

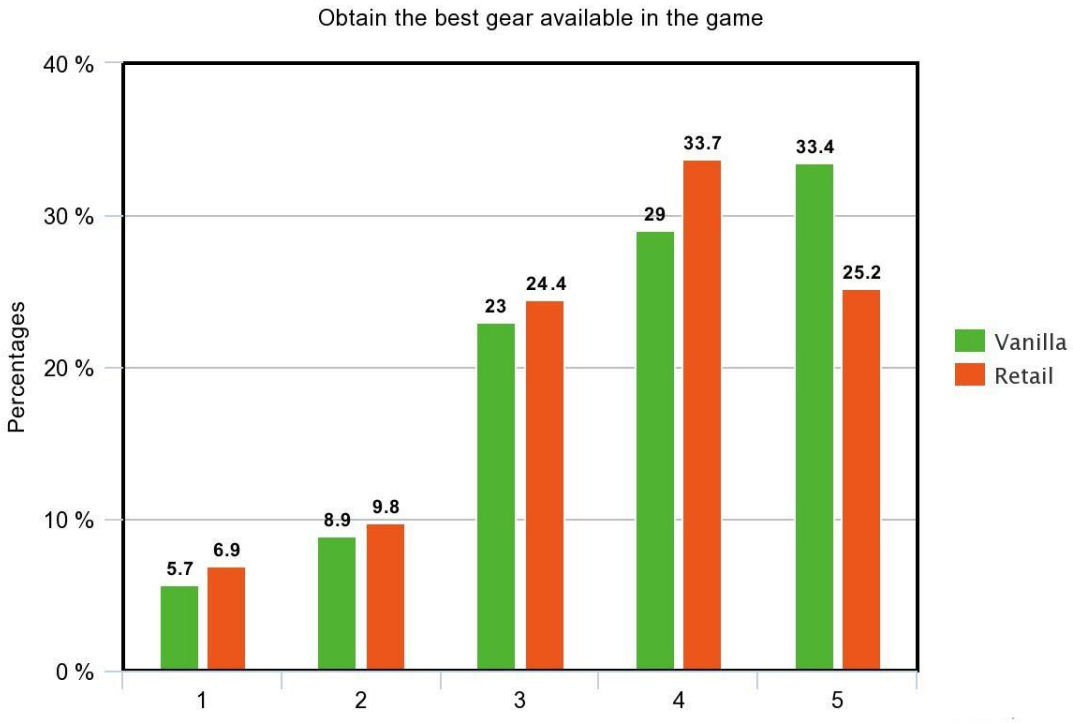


Figure 2 – Both versions put emphasis on gear – 33.4% in Vanilla (n=617) and 25.2% in Retail (n=1000) deem it very important.

In Vanilla the rewards for obtaining the best gear in the game are plenty. Everyone sees the gear you are wearing, your character grows significantly in power compared to the previous set of gear, and you even get different bonuses from wearing enough of one set of gear. There is more variation. In Retail, with the introduction of transmogrification, players are now able to change the appearance of their gear. It was arguably implemented partly because players felt the gear they obtained in the previous expansion was now useless. In Retail it is currently impossible to tell by looking at a player's gear whether they achieved something when the content was relevant

and hard, or after a while when it was easy. There is no longer a separation between players wearing items that are hard to obtain and those that have easily obtainable gear.

One can argue that another major factor in player enjoyment is the gradual rewarding that Vanilla leveling offers. This is emphasized by the differences in the item "Reach the level cap as soon as possible" (Figure 3). As opposed to the large leaps in end-game content, graduality in leveling is arguably more enjoyable than bigger leaps, especially when leveling still took months compared to the days it does now. Every level, players are rewarded a talent point, and every even level they unlock new spells or spell ranks to existing spells that they need to go train at their class trainer. This makes the leveling process evenly paced. Talent points can be applied whenever, but class trainers usually reside in capitals, which means that every two levels players need to take a break from killing monsters and fly to a capital city. Nevertheless, one of the major complaints that discussion about Vanilla leveling brings up should be addressed – the tedious grinding[10]. In Retail the focus has shifted from leveling to other activities, most of which come available once players hit the level cap. While Retail has improved upon the leveling from Vanilla in some respects, it has also removed the old talent system and replaced it with one that only offers a talent point every 15 levels. Similarly, spells are now automatically rewarded every few levels. While gaining experience is faster and players level up more quickly, the pacing has been taken out of the players hands. After level 15 one could arguably level up merely by standing still and queueing up to dungeons using the dungeon finder tool taking away most of the experience the game has to offer. Once the maximum level is reached in Vanilla, players had less activities than on Retail. It can still be argued that because the ratio of time vs. reward was higher in Vanilla it made achieving something more rewarding. In Retail the trend appears to be such that the game offers smaller rewards more often and thus inflates the ratio. According to the data it seems that while being hugely popular in Retail to level up rapidly, it is only moderately popular for players in Vanilla to be "as fast as possible".

[10] Repetitive tasks players engage in to gain experience (Techopedia).

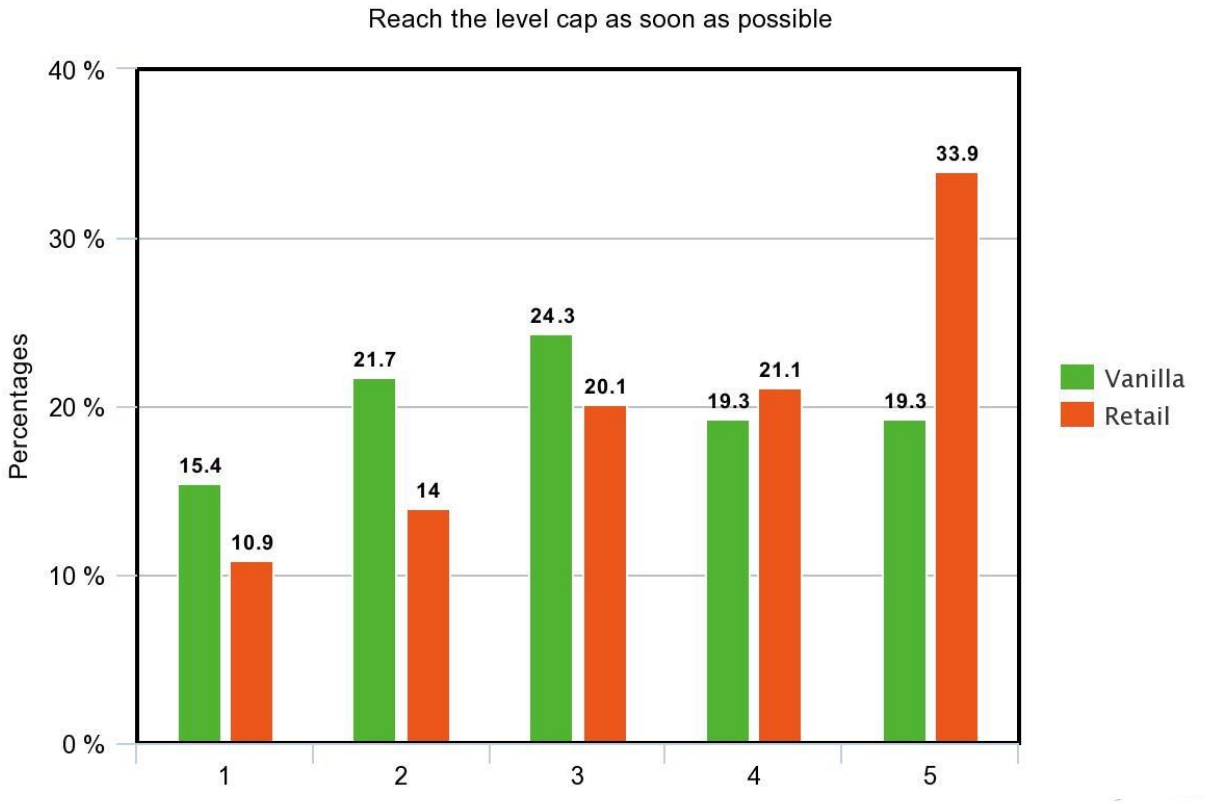


Figure 3 – In Retail (n=1000) focus is mostly in the end game, in Vanilla (n=617) on the leveling process.

6.2.4. Killers of fun

Both Vanilla and Retail showed approximately the same results in terms of the mean comparison of the Killer group. As Bartle (1996) stated, Killers are an unavoidable minority in multiplayer games. He mentioned that Killers are players who enjoy a similar act to that of the Achievers in that they want to rule over others. But where Achievers accomplish that vicariously by amassing something that others do not have, or rule over them in consenting PvP combat, Killers practice the art of trolling (see p. 19).

The strongest items in the Killer category were “Provoking other players in some manner”, “Causing distress to other players”, and “Intentionally misleading players in some way”. All three focus on intentionally causing harm to other players. The fourth item: “Killing significantly weaker or worse players than myself” had a weaker relationship to the Killer category than the others, and arguably for a good reason. Every player of World of Warcraft has come across a situation

where a much higher-level player has killed their character simply because they saw them in the game world. Some players repeat this action multiple times, deriving pleasure from letting the other player run back and resurrect their character only to be killed again. These *gankers* (see p. 22) are what most people would consider the prime candidates for the Killer player type. But arguably not all instances fall under it. There is a big difference in killing someone once for fun, and in killing them over and over again. Players who answered that they do this very often made up 5.8% of all the answers in Vanilla and 8.1% in Retail, but compared to the other items in that category: “Provoking other players in some manner” (Vanilla = 3.2%, Retail = 2.7%) “Causing distress to other players” (Vanilla = 2.9%, Retail = 1.9%) and “Intentionally misleading players in some way” (Vanilla= 1%, Retail = 1.5%) we can see that the others offer much lower values. This further supports the fact that killing weaker or worse players is not always something that requires conscious effort and thought, but more something that might happen from time to time. It is also arguably the easiest to do out of the four actions a player can make to annoy other players.

In terms of differences between Retail and Vanilla, some observations can be made. First, by analyzing the survey items we can explain why there is variation in the answers. “Killing significantly weaker or worse players than myself” is surely an item focusing on Killers, but it also does not state where the action happens. The reason why this item had more answers of 5 may be because this can also be done in a battleground where players consent to probably being killed. A player may just enjoy killing weaker players in situations like these, which makes categorizing this specific behavior hard. It can easily be justified by the rules of the battleground: kill the opposing players and so stop them from completing the goal before your team does. Some merely find it rewarding to kill someone who cannot pose as a threat to you.

6.3. Limitations

This thesis uses a survey to study two different versions of World of Warcraft. The biggest limitation to this approach is the fact that private servers only offer an imitation of what the game used to be, and what arguably Blizzard's Classic WoW will be when released. So, it must be noted that while the aim is to determine how these different versions answer to player motivations, there are things that are arguably different on private servers from the original. These differences are minute, and the game as a whole is a very close imitation of the original (WoW Forums).

Studying different player motivations and differences in affordance between game versions with a survey also has limitations. *Selection bias* (Heckmann, 1979) has to be noted when gathering data from forums that arguably the most enthusiastic players frequent. Selection bias means that when gathering data from platforms specifically meant for groups that are the most active in an activity the data does not correctly represent the whole target audience. On the other hand, by targeting players that also frequent subreddits dedicated to WoW the survey targets those that are arguably above average in terms of interest and knowledgeability about the game. Surveys are also inherently limiting in the scope of interpretation as opposed to open-ended questions or semi-structured interviews (Evans and Mathur, 2005). At the same time, quantitative survey data can be used to indicate patterns of behavior in large groups and to study and analyze those behaviors in an objective manner (Goertzen, 2017).

The survey was created for this thesis and thus has not been previously validated. In addition, the survey items offered interesting data especially on forms of social play and exploration in the two versions, but in broad terms only. By focusing on only one area, e.g. social play, a more detailed study could be done to determine exactly how much mechanics implemented into the game affect that phenomenon. This thesis observed game mechanics and hypothesized that these implementations are likely to be the cause of changes in player motivations. Still, it cannot conclusively determine which mechanics influence this the most, only point future research in the right direction.

7. Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to compare two versions of World of Warcraft and draw conclusions on how they differ, what might cause them to differ, and what types of affordances they offer players. What motivated the study was years of experience in both Retail WoW and private servers running on patch 1.12.1. Studying player motivations in MMO's is important as this information helps developers create more meaningful games that successfully cater to different types of players. The implementation of different game mechanics and their impact on player enjoyment merits more academic research. Focusing on a single game in different stages of development offers valuable insight into how different implementations affect the motivations of players of that game, and as such this thesis works as a basis from which future studies can benefit and draw from. Based on the results, future research should focus on studying the importance of different forms of socializing and how these aspects are affected by game mechanics. Because of these reasons the author felt it was justified and necessary to conduct a study on comparing player motivations in different versions of World of Warcraft.

The first step was to determine the best approach for the study by drawing on previous research and empirical studies on virtual communities, collaboration in games, and player type theory among others. Bartle's taxonomy of player types was used as a guideline to categorize the survey items and to form clear groups for comparison. Yee's empirical studies on player motivations were a major inspiration in formulating the survey items. The reason Bartle's player types were used was explained to be because of the need for clear groups for comparison between game versions. It was acknowledged that Yee proved that Bartle's theory has flaws, and that the player types indeed overlap. The aim of this study was not to prove either wrong, but to build on their theories in order to compare different versions of the same game. After coming to a decision on the theory for the model, a survey posted on relevant subforums in Reddit was deemed the best approach to answer the research questions and offered the largest number of respondents. After eliminating the extremes as well as incomplete responses the surveys added up to 1617 respondents with complete answers.

After the data was gathered the player types Explorer, Achiever, Socializer, and Killer were validated with EFA and CFA. After improving the model fit the CFA provided sufficient results and the model was deemed worthy of further analysis. An analysis of variance was then conducted to highlight larger scale differences – comparing means of each player type between game versions provided interesting results. Socializers had the largest difference in mean followed by Explorers, both reporting higher means in Vanilla. The Achiever and Killer categories did not provide significant mean differences, which was interesting in its own right. After the analysis of the data was done discussion of the findings was had.

The discussion of the differences between Vanilla and Retail highlighted major changes in the game that have, in some cases, worked against the previous player base. World of Warcraft is seemingly moving more toward single player and "multiple players" and away from casual social play. This is not to say that either version is worse than the other, as definitions of good and bad are subjective. What this proves is that Vanilla and Retail WoW are catering to different types of players, and the reason for the decline in subscriptions to Retail could be because more old players are leaving than new players are introduced to the game. This thesis cannot definitively answer why WoW is losing popularity, but it defines some aspects of gameplay, such as the diminishing need for social play, that might be influencing the phenomenon. After all, World of Warcraft is a multiplayer game.

Related studies on community and collaborative play (Nardi and Harris, 2006) and (Braithwaite, 2018) highlight the importance of collaboration in MMO's. The data points in the same direction in terms of social behavior of players between the game versions, highlighting the importance of different forms of socializing. Certain game mechanics are hypothesized as affecting casual socializing, and in being the reason it is in decline and changing shape in World of Warcraft today. The results indicate that the same can be said about exploration. It seems that while WoW is still considered a multiplayer game, and both groups enjoy playing with others, Vanilla attracts more social players who engage in casual social interaction such as making new friends and chatting with other players. This thesis argues that due to the implementation of tools and player utilities, the need for making new friends and having casual conversations has diminished. Retail players still enjoy playing with friends, but according to the data do so more rarely than in Vanilla. The

fact that exploration was more favored in Vanilla shows that it is necessary in that game version, as exploration is needed in almost everything one does and thus deters players who do not enjoy that type of gameplay.

Among the two categories that did not differ significantly in their means there were still notable differences to be found on an individual item level. The focus on reaching the maximum level was heavily favored in Retail, where as in Vanilla the answers were more evenly spread. This highlights Retail WoW's focus being in the late game and Vanilla's being more evenly distributed between leveling and growing in power once you reach the level cap. Also, the fact that Achievers did not differ significantly in favor of Retail was interesting, because Retail arguably offers more incentives for achieving things in-game.

All in all, the study provided interesting results and sparked even more interesting discussion about the differences between game versions – something that had not been previously done using private servers. Nevertheless, being the author's first survey there were some aspects that can be improved upon. For example, some of the items were worded in a suboptimal way. The pilot test provided useful feedback for revision, but there were still ambiguous items such as the two that were discarded from the four groups. Doing away with vagueness in the survey items would offer more precise data and thus more definitive results. Nevertheless, this thesis was necessary in order to illuminate differences between two versions of World of Warcraft and argued why these differences exist. Any of the items in the survey could be expanded and studied in their own right.

The overall process was deemed a success – providing valid data in sufficient amounts for analysis. The research questions were also answered with the data gathered. Socializing proved to be more important in Vanilla arguably because of changes made to the game, and the two versions now cater to different types of players with Retail being less oriented in casual social play. The decision to opt out of gathering demographic data was a double-edged sword. The survey would have focused on different aspects such as the influence of age, gender, etc. on playing WoW and the data would have been more robust, but at the same time the added level of analysis would have been too large for a thesis this size.

Game design is a complex concept and as this thesis has noted, different design choices cater to different types of players. In terms of MMO game design, where the word *multiplayer* is in the name, this thesis has shown that different design choices can be used to promote social play or deter from it. The data indicates that more is not always better, and rewards do not feel rewarding when the effort required for achieving them is diminished. Among the possible future studies on this topic attention should also be drawn to Blizzard's Classic WoW that is to be released in the summer of 2019. These results can be compared with those from the official Classic server. The aim should be to learn more about how much they differ from private servers, and whether this has a significant impact on the types of players they serve. This would provide more information on what aspects different players enjoy and why. The study done on Ragnarök Online (Debeauvais and Nardi, 2010) shows that there are clear differences between WoW and RO private servers, and on what aspects appeal to the players. There is much to be learned about player motivations in MMO's, and this study took one approach out of many. There will undoubtedly be more accurate models for player types that take into account multiple aspects of player motivations such as behavioral data and psychological factors (Tuunanen and Hamari, 2012).

With the release of Classic WoW, studies comparing the two versions of World of Warcraft will likely become more common. Private servers in themselves should also be studied more as an interesting phenomenon that run on the motivations of gamers to experience things the official servers do not offer. They will arguably continue to do so even when the official games might seize to exist.

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Appendices

Survey items:

i. Obtain the best gear available in the game
ii. Be the best at what I do
iii. Maximize my output and performance over others
iv. Reach the level cap as soon as possible
v. Feel a sense of completion playing the game
vi. Choose my class based on its output and performance
vii. Making new friends in the game world
viii. Casually chatting with other players
ix. Joining a guild so that you can find more people to play with
x. Forming groups even if the task does not necessarily require one
xi. Playing with friends over playing by myself
xii. Helping others, even if they do not ask for help
xiii. Provoking other players in some manner
xiv. Causing distress to other players
xv. Intentionally misleading players in some way
xvi. Killing significantly weaker or worse players than myself
xvii. Collect mounts, pets, toys, etc.
xviii. Learning about the lore to make sense of events in-game
xix. Choosing my class based on its feel, class fantasy, etc.
xx. Testing the limits of the game world
xxi. Finding easter eggs/secrets within the game
xxii. Theorycrafting to understand the hidden mechanics of the game
xxiii. Discovering new or "unreachable" places in the game world

Raw survey data

Vanilla private servers: https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdgJDez6UxRDsy0hV9X-u8KRivCPngKYLv3DCgGYa9pFQQyhA/viewanalytics

Retail: https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdv9G-JrkySw-nkbB3-E4pY320PPQiUll32BB1efLmtiWe_DA/viewanalytics